



HeadsUp Forum # 43

[www.HeadsUp.org.uk](http://www.HeadsUp.org.uk)

## The Media... is it doing its job?

(21 November – 9 December 2011)

This forum gave young people the chance to debate issues around the media and its role in our lives. This debate came at a particularly opportune moment with the Leveson Inquiry taking evidence from celebrities familiar to young people, such as JK Rowling and Charlotte Church, throughout the period of the forum.

A number of decision-makers supported the forum;

- **Philip Davies MP** - Member of the Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee;
- **John Hemming MP** - Chair of the All-Party New Media Group;
- **Jo Swinson MP** – former Liberal Democrat Spokesperson for Culture, Media and Sport and Vice-Chair of the All-Party Media Literacy Group;
- **John Thurso MP** – former member of the Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee;
- **Baroness Morris** - former Minister of State, Department of Culture, Media and Sport;
- **Viscount Falkland** – former Spokesperson for Culture, Media and Sport;
- **Carolyn Quinn** – BBC journalist and Chair of the Parliamentary Press Gallery;
- **Daniel Booth** – Editor, Web User magazine;
- **Susanna Giner** – Youth Media Agency.

# The Media...is it doing its job?

## Forum Summary

There were a total of 187 comments posted<sup>∞</sup> from fifty seven student HeadsUp users - with 4,924 visits to the site over the course of the forum.

The debate was split into four threads that focused on the significant and current issues for young people around the media. These threads were:

- The Role of the Media
- Press Freedom
- New Media
- You in the Media

The general themes and directions of the debate are highlighted in the following pages, along with specific ideas given by forum users.<sup>1</sup>

### Media focus

Many of the discussions around the role of the media mentioned the lack of focus on serious political issues and there was plenty of debate about what the media was for – serious news, entertainment or both? Some users said that while they did enjoy reading about celebrity gossip, they also wanted more serious political issues to be addressed more often:

*I think the media is too concentrated on the "celebrities" to focus on important political issues. During these difficult times the media should focus the recovery and helping people pick themselves up*

*some newspapers have stories about celebrities and some have more stories about political issues so there's a good balance in my opinion!*

*I think they should report more on news stories like crimes, criminals and important discoveries. Maybe if they included more crimes like kidnapping and murders and assaults they might awaken people especially young people who are main targets of these type crime. This therefore may prevent some crimes.*

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<sup>∞</sup> Includes: young people, moderators, teachers and decision-makers.

<sup>1</sup> All quotes are direct and unamended.

*I think that a newspaper should have these sections: World news, Local news, juicy gossip, sports, weather, etc, etc. That way we can find out information quickly and it would be much easier.*

*the media is there for mainly entertainment, and we can't lie by saying we don't enjoy reading what goes on in other peoples lives?*

*i think its a good mix between celebrity gossip, local news and government news, but i think more people our age want to know about local news and celebrity news because thats more what we are interested in*

*Tabloids may put a bit more celebrity items in their newspapers but thats why we buy them... I think we all have a weakness for reading about other peoples lives...*

*i think that the media focus on celebrities too much and that they should write more about things that are more important in society. i.e crime.*

Some students suggested that the media should focus more on investigative journalism but that it should do this within the law.

*I think the media should uncover the injustice and corruption of this world to its readers*

*I think that a 'free press' should have every right to report upon what it deems interesting or important or unfair etc but journalistic organisations need to be reminded of the morales that most people stick to. For example, I know that invasion of privacy, such as phone hacking and going through someone's bins, is wrong and so should every newspaper editor. The media can be a tool for great change and it is time for it to see some of its own- investigate and uncover scandals by all means but know where to draw the line.*

### **Media portrayal of young people**

Not surprisingly, those commenting on the forum were very unhappy with the negative reporting of young people in most of the media. Many of the comments suggested that journalists should be writing more about the positive things that young people do such as voluntary work in their communities. It was acknowledged, however, that local newspapers more often mention young people in a positive light than the national media.

*The local newspapers say good things about young people like photographing young people who have done good deeds or who have won awards.*

*Not all teenagers are trouble- making tyrants. Unfortunately there are a lot of gangs and there are a lot of bad youngsters but not all youngsters are bad*

*When you read the newspapers they say that take the riots for example. They only mentioned young people doing this, but a fair few young people were helping clear up the mess and a few adults rioted too.*

*Whilst there are a few bad apples the majority of teenagers are clever, caring and contribute to society positively. Newspapers and TV constantly brand young people as binge drinking, drug taking, fire starting, pregnant at 16, violence causing nuisances. However this is clearly untrue. Take a step outside, or go into town, how*

*many young people are there who would fit these stereotypes?...Therefore isn't it unfair that the media is constantly stereotyping ALL young people in these negative ways. Using a previous example of the August Riots, almost 90% of headlines mentioned teenagers as the sole cause, or almost sole cause, of the violence. But did you know that only 19% of arrests made and sentences given were to young people aged 11-18? Teenagers were unfairly blamed for the rioting and destruction when the majority of the crimes were actually committed by older people. Therefore was it fair that the media automatically assumed that it was teenagers that caused this unrest? All in all I think that I am represented unfairly in the media, likewise with every other young person. Do journalists have the right to decide how we act? And in turn affect how our futures could turn out as members of this generation?*

*children/teens are portrayed as being very rebellious, all the time, whereas this is hardly ever true! Yes, I know that sometimes children/teens do rebel and do drink or do drugs etc but maybe the media should show good things young people have done instead of only bad things!*

*the media makes us teen look like rubbish, where we can all clearly see that this isn't the truth as we're all on here expressing our views on the media. sometimes yes there are some people that can be badly behaved but that doesn't mean we all are! but that's all the media see and the power and influence they have over everyone makes everyone believe everything they say which makes us seem to be in the bad all the time.*

*What they could do is ban any biased complaints and have people check them over before publishing them and put more of the awards and other things we win instead. Only local newspapers have good things about us.*

Some felt that young people are over-exposed in the media particularly on superficial reality TV shows but young people are rarely mentioned in a serious context unless they have been accused of wrongdoing.

*the media puts on shows that show teenagers at their worst such as young dumb and living off mum*

*I do think that sometimes TV makes all teenagers sound mopey, moany and stropky and often rude and sometimes stupid or thick. This is mainly because they feel that it will get better viewing because everyone 'loves' watching a bunch of teens moan about their own issues.*

One student mentioned how angry she felt at an article in her local newspaper but didn't complain as she felt she wouldn't be taken seriously. Others mentioned feeling as if they had no voice and that their age counted against them if they did speak out.

*I nearly wrote a letter into the newspaper, but didn't. Basically a few adults had written into the local newspaper saying that the new park was being vandalised by ALL young people. I instantly thought this wasn't fair because every young person I know and of course myself hadn't vandalised the park. I was infuriated! In the end I didn't write to the newspaper because I thought that one 11 year old girl wasn't going to make a difference. Young people need to have more confidence to speak out to the papers. One day I hope to be a journalist so hopefully I will get my voice heard!!*

*I strongly feel that: 1) us young people are criticised to much 2) we never get our opinions heard... if we ever see children on tv it's because they have done something wrong or something bad has happened to them. Maybe there should be more websites like this which help young people get their opinions across.*

*The young people have a right to be heard and they treat us like a piece of rubbish. I mean, they were once children themselves, so they must at least respect our views and opinions.*

### **Press intrusion**

One of the biggest areas of discussion on the forum was the issue of paparazzi and intrusion into the lives of famous people. Many of the users on the forum felt that the level to which celebrities were currently followed and scrutinised by the press was unacceptable, particularly when it involved their children and families.

*Celebrities should be able to keep their private photos a secret. They can't enjoy a day at the beach without the press watching them every move.*

*I think that celebrities should be able to keep their children away from the media because if they want their children and they're affairs out the spotlight then I think they should have the right to do so.*

*The paparazzi have to much freedom. When people are young...they may want to be famous, but when they see the number of pictures and videos of celebrities being followed and other stuff it puts us off. I wouldn't want to be famous would you?*

Other users thought that media interest in the lives of celebrities was acceptable to a degree and that most people who were celebrities knew this before they became famous. Intrusion was accepted by some as one of the things that go with a celebrity lifestyle.

*I think sometimes the Paparazzi take it a step too far but most celebrities are aware of the fact that the Paparazzi while go to wild lengths to get photos of them before they become famous so really its upto them if they want to go through that....*

*celebrities know the pressure that they will undergo after their stardom. Another point is that the media make the celebrities more famous.*

*Only people with talent should be famous and those who cheat there way into being famous deserve to be annoyed by the paparazzi. If they get fed up then it serves them right for using TV programmes to become famous when they have no talent.*

*The media should be able to write what ever they want unless its libel because everyone deserves freedom of speech*

*even though I do think that celebrities do deserve some freedom, the reason they are famous is because of the media and because everyone is interested in their lives.*

One of the major concerns for forum users about limiting the freedom of the press to report on celebrities' lives was that magazines and newspapers might lose money as a result. It was also highlighted that the audience are

partly to blame for this intrusion as they buy the papers and magazines that write these articles.

*in a way it is like a bully in a playground they r egged on by us. i mean we buy there magazines dont we. and if no one bought them they wouldnt have a reason to chase the celebrities or have any money to do so. so in a way it isnt just there fault it is ours.*

Overall, most of those contributing to this debate thought that the press should be able to write stories about celebrities, but that the behaviour of the paparazzi did too often cross the line into harassment. There was also some concern that people who might have a talent that would make them famous might be put off pursuing this career.

### **Reliable information online**

One of the biggest concerns that young people expressed on the forum was with the reliability of information found on the internet. Many felt that deciding which information to trust was generally a matter of common sense but it was also felt that it might be easy to be caught out. Some students suggested that deliberately untruthful or misleading sites should be shut down.

*Many stories on the internet are unreliable, as anyone could post on the internet. Take wikipedia for example. You could ask a science question and a hairdresser could change it. Honestly you can't trust everything you see on the internet, which means you could get the whole of your homework wrong*

*you can't trust everything on the internet, but will always be a proper website that has true information like BBC...If you find some information on the internet, you could always check by looking in books and just checking that what the internet says is correct.*

*at school we are encouraged to use more reliable websites and are often given reasearch homework which makes us want to use better websites but sometimes that's not possible. When reading a passage on a website you can usually tell what is fiction or truth.*

*There are lots of different internet sites, and not all of them are good. Some could be written by anyone in the world, who knows nothing about the subject. I always check more than one site, to make sure they agree with eachother.*

*The government even if they can't shut down sites that aren't in the UK I think they should still delete all wrong and out of date websites in the UK. Maybe if we do other countries will follow until only correct websites are available.*

### **Social networking**

The use of social networks for illegal activities was also an issue that came up in debate and was something that had been discussed widely in the media after the summer's riots. Most thought that entirely shutting down social networks was quite unfair for the majority but there were suggestions about how illegal activity on social networks could be tackled.

*I think it should be taken into consideration that if they shut down social networking sites whenever there is a national crisis it isn't really fair because it doesn't necessarily mean that everyone is involved and it would disrupt thousands of people and relatives from all over the country from talking to each other and making plans. However I do think that if everyone on the site is sending out negative messages it should be monitored and the people doing so should be blocked and stopped*

*I think that if the government believe that a website or social network is being used to do illegal things then they should have the power to investigate then, if necessary shut the website down.*

*I don't think that the government should shut the social networking because many people rely on the internet*

*Social networking sites shouldn't be banned as family and friends use them to keep in touch if they live far away and can't see each other, but they should be monitored so less riots and other things take place.*

### **Online media literacy**

In general the students commenting in this debate appeared to be quite web savvy and understood many of the areas of concern that adults often have about young people and the internet. Checking the reliability of information on the net and thinking about the privacy of personal information that people publish about themselves are examples of this.

*Facebook privacy settings are very important, because they stop nasty people finding you or anything else. It should be the first thing facebook offer people when they first join what privacy setting would you like.*

*It is extremely important for children to have their privacy setting on friends only because otherwise it opens up the opportunity for dodgy men etc to track and follow kids.*

Students were directed to <http://accidentaloutlaw.knowthenet.org.uk/> by one of the decision-makers. This site asks participants to choose the scenarios that they feel are illegal to highlight what can be shared and viewed legally on the net and what kind of information breaches the law. The students on HeadsUp generally did very well in knowing what was legal and illegal online but they felt they should have known more – many suggested that some elements of the law relating to the internet was confusing and could be clearer.

*I think the law should be more clear, as many people don't know what is illegal and legal.*

*I thought that I knew what was illegal and legal. At least I have learnt a lot from it.*

*I don't know as much as I thought I did about the law...none of the rules are clear enough anymore, and that everything seems so complicated!*

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## Political Context

During the forum a number of discussions and inquiries were happening regarding the media. The Culture, Media and Sport Committee questioned James Murdoch again about phone hacking and the Leveson Inquiry took evidence on the wider ethical and moral questions brought to the fore by the behaviour of the tabloid press. Famous people such as JK Rowling, Charlotte Church, Sienna Miller and others gave evidence to the inquiry as the HeadsUp debate was live.

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HeadsUp makes sure that young people's views on the media are sent to the appropriate policy-makers, journalists and politicians so they can take into account young people's perspectives.

The HeadsUp team would like to convey our thanks and appreciation to the decision-makers, young people and teachers who got involved in this important debate. We would also like to extend an invitation to interested parties, particularly legislators and government, interested NGOs, academics and journalists to respond to the findings. Responses and requests for further information should be directed to:

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