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I am writing in response to Fox's submission about competition and market authority regarding media plurality.

The main issue I would like to raise relates to the perceived "consensus" about the waning influence of newspapers in light of the 2017 UK general election result.

The evidence used to support this proposition is not based on any hard data. It is mainly drawn from think pieces by media commentators and three academics (who also do not refer to any evidence). The main reason to support this claim is that, despite the highly partisan newspaper coverage that demonized the Labour party and its leader Jeremy Corbyn, the electoral outcome was a Conservative hung parliament (not, as predicted, a Conservative landslide). And that more young people, who voted to a greater extent than the previous election, were turning to social media for news about the campaign.

The limited evidence used to support this perceived "consensus" about a waning influence of newspapers was even acknowledged in Fox's report: "...none of the analyses quoted above represent a forensic examination of the election".

While I would agree new content and social media platforms played a key role in the 2017 UK election campaign, this does not mean newspapers did not *also* play a key agenda setting role and influence many older voters who continue to regularly read newspapers.

Renton and Scholsberg's analysis of the role played by newspapers and their journalists during the 2017 election campaign shows this:

"Across both its daily Broadcast programme "The Papers" and in the "Papers Blog" the BBC is giving between sixty nine and ninety five percent more coverage and discussion to papers supporting the Conservative Party than is balanced, using 2015 election voting as a reference. It is doing this at the expense of other parties who polled similar numbers at that election. Further, in its selection of Guests to discuss the newspaper outputs in its broadcasts, it is giving almost twice as much airtime to Guests affiliated as individuals of from organisations linked with the Conservative Party. No trade unionists or charity representatives were featured in the sample, and no politicians except from the Conservative party". Source:
<http://www.mediareform.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/BBC-NEWSPAPERS-REPORT-FINAL.pdf>

Throughout Fox's submission they argue that young people are increasingly using online media for news – and not newspapers or broadcast media. However, You Gov's poll in August 2017 contradicts that, since a majority of 18-24 year olds believed TV was most important to their vote compared to 50% who thought it was social media. Overall, 42% thought TV was

most important to their vote, far higher than the 26% who indicated social media. Indeed, newspapers were perceived as being more influential social media (32%).

Brits believe TV was most important to their GE2017 vote

And how much influence, if any, do you think each of the following had in helping you choose who to vote for or in confirming your choice of who to vote for? %



Source: <https://yougov.co.uk/news/2017/08/04/brits-believe-traditional-media-mattered-more-2017/>

The evidence shows that older people were far more likely to vote at the election than young people, and read newspapers and vote conservative. Using You Gov data, it has been claimed the influence of newspapers – particularly among older people – in the 2017 election may have prevented a Labour victory. See <https://politicsmeanspolitics.com/was-it-the-newspapers-that-stopped-labour-in-2017-90a470ab6925>

The author of this analysis, Heskett, found that:

“In YouGov’s 2015 post-election study 47% of their readers voted Conservative. In 2017 that figure rose to 59%. Clearly, the Sun did a much better job in 2017 in swinging it’s voters to the Tories than it did in 2015. Similarly the Mail. In 2015 59% of their readers voted Conservative, in 2017 that had risen to 74%. Express—51% Conservative in 2015, 77% in 2017. Obviously, the move of UKIP readers the Conservatives is a factor but it is notable that Labour, which also mopped up the votes of smaller parties in the election, found it much harder to raise their vote share amongst readers of the Sun, Mail, and Express”.

While these findings should be cautiously interpreted, they are – unlike Fox’s more anecdotal evidence – based on hard data. At the very least, it shows the continued role newspapers play in influencing older people who are more likely to vote Conservative than Labour.

Throughout Fox’s submission there is also reference to a waning influence of newspapers in 2016. And yet, the Eurosceptic views of many newspapers arguably played a major role during the EU referendum in shaping people’s opinions not just over the campaign but over the many decades before it. The European Parliament even has a dedicated webpage recording myths put out by UK newspapers:

<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/unitedkingdom/en/media/euromyths.html>

So, as Ofcom’s assessment concluded, in my view it would premature to suggest the editorial power of newspapers is over. They continue to influence millions of older voters and help set the agenda of broadcasters.

It is also worth pointing out that Fox's submission (pp.25-26) downplayed some of the findings of the Cardiff University agenda setting study (I was lead author on) about the influence newspapers had on television news during the 2015 election campaign.

They rightly said: "the study found that of the 140 policy stories covered by TV, just 31% had appeared in newspapers previously." But in time spent (not frequency) this represented 61.1% of airtime about policy issues. This revealed the *prominence* broadcast news places on stories also reported by newspapers, which the Fox submission wrongly said the study did not examine. This prominence was also represented in Table 4 which looked at the top 12 stories broadcasters covered that were previously reported by the press – and the amount of airtime they took up on UK television news that night.

But most strikingly they failed to acknowledge that many broadcast news editors continue to rely on newspapers as a source of stories if they are deemed newsworthy. There is no evidence to suggest that broadcasters have changed their perspective about this or are now relying on alternative online sources such as the Canary (beyond occasional mentions in formal newspaper or website reviews), which Fox's submission views as key source of influence post-2017 election. As interviews with senior editors in the study revealed, newspapers continue to help set the agenda for broadcasters.

Yours sincerely

Stephen Cushion