

21ST CENTURY FOX/SKY MERGER INQUIRY (PHASE 2)

Summary of hearing with the Daily Mail and General Trust on 2 November 2017

Introduction

1. Peter Wright (PW) confirmed that he is Editor Emeritus at Associated Newspapers, which is the consumer publishing division of the Daily Mail and General Trust plc (DMGT).
2. Martin Clarke (MC) confirmed that he is Publisher at Mail Online.

Views on the online news landscape

3. MC stated that brand awareness is very important to enable an online news provider to become successful.
4. MC stated that readers online are mainly interested in breaking news as opposed to opinion pieces.
5. MC stated that the decision of what news to put online is determined mainly by the interests of readers as opposed to any political agenda.
6. MC explained that online news provision requires a very different approach from print media. The Mail Online was set up from scratch separately from the print team.
7. MC stated that news provision online covers a broader range of topics. MC explained that this is necessary to be able to compete against social media platforms that also offer a variety of news and information.
8. MC stated that, from an editorial perspective, pictures and videos are more important online to be able to attract more readers and viewers.
9. MC confirmed that the Mail Online runs a television show in the US. MC explained that it is unlikely that the news provider would be able to launch a show in the UK due to difference in regulation in the two countries.

10. MC stated that US online news providers like Huffington Post and BuzzFeed are now growing in the UK.
11. MC stated that UK news providers like The Guardian have considerable online presence in the US.
12. MC stated that search engines and social networks are important to online news providers as they direct a lot of traffic to their websites.
13. MC stated that social networks amplify news stories.

Views on editorial strategy

14. PW stated that within the news industry, generally the choice of stories is determined both by what the newspaper's readership is interested in and what the newspaper feels should be brought to the attention of the public.
15. MC explained that editorial lines taken by a newspaper editor are very much determined by instinctively knowing what his readers think and listening to feedback from readers. Editors communicate with readers and observe feedback from them.
16. PW stated that editorial views in The Daily Mail are not determined whatsoever by its owner. DMGT editors decide editorial lines without interference, for example, the Daily Mail and Mail on Sunday took different stances in relation to Brexit.

Views on media plurality

17. PW stated that, as far as political viewpoints are concerned, there is sufficient media plurality in the UK, especially with the increased presence of online news providers.
18. MC explained that there is an online phenomenon known as the "echo chamber phenomenon". This refers to when online sites increasingly feed more of one type of article to the same readers.

Views on media influence

19. PW explained that choice of stories, presentation of news and the credibility of a newspaper all contribute towards influence on people, though it is difficult to change opinions of readers.

20. PW explained that diverse types of media have various kinds of influence on their readership and audience. The BBC is by far the most influential on account of its enormous reach.
21. PW stated that newspapers such as The Daily Mail have influence through being able to provide comment and interpretation on news stories.
22. PW stated that newspapers can have influence on public policy. PW gave an example of how The Daily Mail ran a campaign for the banishment of plastic bags from supermarkets. This campaign helped create changes in the law.
23. MC stated that every media organisation imposes a particular view of the news on the public simply by making a choice on the stories it covers.
24. PW opined that The Sun and The Times do not follow the same stories and do not necessarily have the same political agenda.
25. PW stated that there is a debate on whether social media has replaced the traditional media as a means for politicians to communicate with the public.
26. MC stated that the influence of Murdoch-family owned news entities as a result of the Fox/Sky merger is unlikely to considerably increase. MC explained that this is because the BBC has significant reach and influence which will be difficult to negate.
27. PW opined that it is very unlikely that Sky News could adopt a delivery of news heavily biased in favour of right-wing views. This is because such delivery would be a breach of the Broadcasting Code.

Compliance with IPSO

28. PW confirmed that he is a member of the Complaints Committee of Independent Press Standards Organisation (IPSO).
29. PW stated that industry members in IPSO are not serving editors and are appointed by an independent panel.
30. PW stated that The Daily Mail has to publish annual reports on how it has addressed all complaints against it.
31. PW explained that IPSO has the power to investigate and impose fines on member newspapers even where there is no complaint. IPSO can carry out an investigation when a newspaper has committed a serious and systemic breach, which could be the commitment of three breaches of the same nature.

32. PW stated that IPSO sets and provides guidance on press standards. This can be in specific areas of reporting such as on transgender issues and suicide. IPSO has also published an Editors' code that every journalist needs to adhere to.
33. PW opined that the presence and powers of IPSO make newspapers exercise more discretion in their reporting.