

In the third CSR Breakfast roundtable, hosted by Ethical Performance and London-based consultancy Lumina CR, an invited group of senior media industry professionals discussed the ethical issues facing their companies. Chatham House rules applied and none of their quotes are attributed. Reporter: **Nick Spencer**

The media, in all its manifestations, is playing an increasingly dominant role in all our lives. Sometimes visibly, whether via apps, 4G mobile phone technology or the streaming of films and TV programmes. And, occasionally, as in the case of certain phone-hacking *News of the World* journalists, so subtly that their exploits remained undetected for years.

When Lord Justice Leveson was charged with examining 'the culture, practice and ethics' of the press, some may have wondered whether he would find any. But while arguments rage over Leveson's recommendation for statutory regulation of the press, CSR professionals in the wider media world have a raft of ethical issues to consider.

Media companies hold vast amounts of data on their customers – with potential to use it for good or ill. Should their programmes attempt to lead society or reflect it? And where does that leave questions of editorial independence, responsibility and sustainability?

Meanwhile, the proliferation of media platforms has resulted in a fragmentation of audiences, while Twitter and the explosion in social media begs the question as to how one actually defines what a journalist is any more.

As one speaker noted, the media's role in the digital age – with implications for regulation – is a conversation for the whole of society to have. And it is a conversation that is only just beginning.

'The only way is Ethics'

The sanctity of editorial independence is a good starting point, with one head of CSR outlining the problems of telling programme makers what to do – even if the subject is something as important as, say, climate change.

"It's very hard for a company to say, 'you will devote five per cent of airtime to environmental issues'," he said. "I can't change editorial

policy but I can educate staff about what they can do here or at home. So what I've tried to do is put our house in order here.

"When I started, we didn't recycle anything but I have seen instances where the ideas we have here do end up on screen."

A stakeholder engagement manager at a TV company said the question of whether media companies should promote sustainability on their channels polarised opinion, both for and against.

"We have been doing programmes around rainforests and climate change for over three years. We have been trying to learn what makes a programme watchable and how it inspires people in a way that doesn't make them switch over to the sport because it's all doom and gloom.

"We are still learning about how you make the subject entertaining and inspiring but we are getting better at lifting our ratings."

There was no dissenting from the view that a celebrity name was a good way to attract viewers but it was pointed out that important issues can be included subtly – there is no need for a sledgehammer.

One speaker said: "You can't switch one of those house building programmes on without hearing about solar panels, so I think those issues are very well covered."

The head of sustainability at an advertising company indicated a way in which his business, which is all about aspiration, could help.

"It's not about raising awareness among the public – which is already significant – it is about how we move them on to a certain way of behaving. The media has always led

“The rise of new media and new technology means that we are constantly having to redefine what journalism and media is. What is a journalist? A blogger? Someone working for a newspaper?”



Inspirational media post-water cool

in this. It has made smoking uncool while it is really cool to put your seatbelt on.

"It is no good if Sky has fantastic programmes about, say, rainforests and all we do around it is sell cars that pollute the environment. Quite often good work by programming is undone when it is embedded in advertising encouraging a more unsustainable way of living.

"Ultimately we make stuff cool and sexy so we can sell it, and we can surely also do it around this topic."

It sounded, said another speaker, like a risky strategy for advertisers. "Absolutely," he agreed, "but I wasn't hired to be boring. We are here to change these organisations, not to improve our recycling by one per cent!

"The big impact of media is on the attitudes and behaviour of people. If all we did was reflect society, that would be a sorry state of affairs."

Mention of a successful project between Homebase and the Eden Project prompted an interesting exchange on the gap between

consumers' awareness and their behaviour.

Homeowners were given £1,000 to insulate their homes but subsequent research indicated that people from the lowest socio-economic groups made the biggest changes to their lifestyles, while people with the greenest values changed their behaviour the least.

According to the advertising company's head of sustainability, the two biggest obstacles to change are routine and money/affordability. But routine is king: human beings are creatures of habit.

Supermarkets were full of greener and more ethical alternatives, he said. "Our task is to try to make sure it's not more expensive to live slightly better and slightly greener, which it currently is. Ethical media should be about offering opportunities for behaviour change."

The ways in which media companies can reach their audience has never been greater, so what is the trick to engaging consumers? "Make it normal, fun," and "It all follows from education" were two comments.

More controversially, companies hold a lot of sensitive information on consumers. What they do with that



Media in a new world

data will be one of the big challenges of the next couple of years, according to one head of sustainability.

"For example, can we use the data to influence, guide or even sell to advertisers. We could help to influence content. As the landscape changes and consumers do more online, it is going to throw up all sorts of challenges.

"There are commercial opportunities but if there is some bad stuff on our network, we can use that data [such as IP addresses] to help solve crimes."

'Churnalism'

One consequence of the digital age is the advent of the citizen journalist, with implications for understanding where a message originated and a blurring of the line between fact and opinion. Does anyone know how to define journalism these days? And can anyone be one?

"The rise of new media and new technology means that we are constantly having to redefine what journalism and media is," said a policy analyst from a business publisher.

"You may have journalist exemptions [under proposed EU legislation] regarding freedom of expression, but then what is a

journalist? A blogger? Someone writing for a newspaper?"

She added: "If people come to trust advertising more, because they are being marketed to in a better way, through profiling, maybe they will be open to other advertising campaigns with, say, environmental points of view."

However, there are practical difficulties in actually reaching an audience when the number of TV stations has expanded from three to many hundred in the past 30 years. A media consultant said the reach of nightly news bulletins had almost halved, from a high of 25 million.

"As a society, we don't get stories framed in a single, collective way any more. We can seek out stories that are pre-digested into our particular framing.

"That sounds great on one level, but it means the debate becomes increasingly polarised, which I don't think policymakers and media companies have quite got their heads round yet.

"We don't have a national water cooler any more around which we all meet and talk."

Meanwhile, research has shown that, over time, the number of print journalists had halved while the quantity of news stories had gone up by a factor of three. The implications for accuracy and "churnalism" – journalism by press release – were obvious.

Lord McAlpine's numerous libel actions – including against Twitter users – after a defamatory Newsnight report prompted a Project & Communications Manager to say: "We now have to think about what people want to do with the stories we produce, not just the stories themselves."

Technology has changed the whole media landscape. And the conversations over the implications of this change have only just begun

When the discussion turned to practical examples of sustainable policies, there were several positive stories: Sky's Sky Ride scheme, for instance. This has prompted one million more people to cycle regularly and complements their sponsorship of a successful professional team.

"It was about inspiring people to take action because we recognise that, as a media company, we had a broader role to play," said a Sky representative. "We don't talk about getting fit and losing weight because we know that it doesn't inspire people, but we talk about getting on your bike and having fun and creating opportunities for people to do that. We know that it has resulted in change but it is fundamentally addressing sustainability in society."

Today, people are as likely to be connected, digitally, to someone on the other side of the world as they are to talk to their neighbour. It is an exhilarating though unnerving thought. "People are now starting to think about the impact of the digital world on their families," said one head of sustainability. "Child protection, sure, but also cultural changes: telly health, obesity, families not talking around the dinner table. People want to really understand what all this means for the families of tomorrow."

A media consultant concluded: "We are at the beginning of a very complicated societal debate which is going to involve not just the media companies, but policymakers, commentators and society at large. It involves regulation, editorial independence and transparency, but we are right at the very start."

CSR Breakfast is an invitation-only roundtable discussion of ethical issues. This report reflects the discussions at the third event, on the media industry, in February. For details, visit the CSR Breakfast LinkedIn group at www.linkedin.com



people

● **The Global Food Safety Initiative (GFSI)** welcomes three new board members. They are: John Carter, senior director own brand and product quality Assurance, Metro Cash & Carry, Germany; Anthony Huggett, vice president, quality management, at Nestlé, Switzerland; and Jian Xu, vice president, China Resources Vanguard Corporation, China.

● **Roy Lind** has succeeded Lou Moret on the California Public Employees' Retirement System's (CalPERS) board of administration. Lind is a vice-president of the UFCW International Union, a vice-president of the California Labor Federation and also serves as the chair of the Northern California UFCW Employers Pension Fund, which has more than \$3bn in assets. Moret left his position at CalPERS in December 2011.

● **Inge Kauer** has been named executive director of the Access to Nutrition Index (ATNI), a new initiative that will rank food and beverage manufacturers on their nutrition practices. In this role, she will oversee the development of ATNI reports and rankings, which aim to encourage greater consumer access to nutritious products, thereby addressing the global issues of obesity and undernutrition. The Global Index report will be released on March 12.

● **Fenton**, the US public interest communications firm, has appointed Elly Woolston as UK director to lead its new London operation. Fenton believes its new London office will allow the company to service US-based clients' demand to 'deliver on the ground' in Europe, as well as to respond to growing interest in the social change agenda from new clients in the region.

● **The Centre** for Entrepreneurial Learning, based at the Cambridge Judge Business School, has appointed two social entrepreneurs as their 'entrepreneurs in residence'. The two are Keystone Development Trust CEO Dr Neil Stott and Tim Jones, who is CEO of the charitable organisation Allia.