

Part 5: Earned media in a coronavirus world

As the Foreign Secretary has just announced we're entering at least another three weeks of lockdown, and Rishi Sunak has warned of tough times ahead for the UK economy, there's more pressure than ever on the Government to produce a viable exit strategy. Consequently the media has been rife with rumours as to what this might look like, which has had a knock-on effect on this week's news agenda.

And these tough times are still very apparent to the UK's media industry - despite enjoying record readership levels during the pandemic, sharp falls in advertising, conferences and print sales continue to hit revenues. This week The Financial Times, Guardian and Telegraph media groups announced significant cost saving measures, including pay cuts, furloughs and the reduction of pension contributions.

Meanwhile Google is doing its bit to help the declining industry by announcing a global Journalism Emergency Relief Fund, to help small to medium sized news organisations through the pandemic. And the bigger publication houses are still urging consumers to do their bit and buy a paper, as seen in this plea from the Sunday Times Style.

It's fair to say we've seen less brand coverage this week in print as the media speculated on the Government update. Here's this week's low down...

NATIONAL: CONSUMER

As we entered our fourth week of lockdown the nationals dedicated an average of the first nine pages to coronavirus news. Speculation about when it will end and predictions about the serious implications it would have on the economy fronted many of the papers.

However, there were also positive news stories weaved into this week's pages and Captain Tom, a Second World War army veteran, stole our hearts. The 99-year-old, who set out to collect £1,000 for the NHS has raised more than £12 million (and counting) by completing 100 laps of his garden on a Zimmer frame before his 100th birthday. His progress has been documented throughout the week by almost all of the national newspapers, with some papers dedicating the front cover to his story. It was a welcome bit of feel-good news as his extraordinary challenge and humble attitude united the nation.

Many nationals are even now covering how the top breakfast presenters are debating the news. On Wednesday both the Express and the Mail Online's homepage featured an article about Piers Morgan's "explosive" interview on Good Morning Britain with MP Helen Whately. The likes of The Guardian and The Times also covered Tuesday's episode of This Morning, where Eamonn Holmes suggested there may be a link between coronavirus and 5G technology. His comments caused TV regulator Ofcom to receive over 400 complaints and an investigation has now begun.

We've also started to see more research stories creeping their way into this week's papers, however they've nearly all been academic studies conducted by universities or official figures released from the ONS. Whilst it's a good sign that the papers are looking for non-coronavirus

Part 5: Earned media in a coronavirus world (cont'd)

related content, brand PR stories covered in the papers have been scarce, with the exception of in the Daily Star and The Sun.

NATIONAL: BUSINESS

The scrutiny of the stock market continues in earnest across the majority of titles. However, the digital disruptors of the moment are also being subjected to closer inspection, as the winners and losers of the pandemic begin to emerge. A number of companies, from subscription services such as [Netflix](#) to [robotic chefs, waiters and food delivery drones](#) have experienced a rapid ascent in recent weeks, but the corresponding exposure hasn't always been so glowing for some. Take Amazon as an example; despite The Guardian reporting a [\\$24bn growth in fortune for its CEO](#), on the same day it was widely covered that a court ordered the firm to [close all of its warehouses across France](#) due to fears for the safety of workers.

Even the video conferencing platform, Zoom, which has emerged as the hero of the hour in connecting people during the crisis, has not escaped some criticism, with numerous reports of [privacy concerns](#).

The airline industry is back in the headlines this week, as people begin to speculate as to when planes will take to the skies again. A number of national media outlets, including [BBC](#) and [The Guardian](#), have covered EasyJet's announcement that it plans to put passengers before profits by keeping middle seats empty to encourage the continuation of social distancing once restrictions are lifted.

LIFESTYLE

Lifestyle publications are increasingly sharing content to reassure readers that it is ok if they're simply surviving, not thriving during the pandemic and using the time for self-improvement. Tyla recently polled it's audience to reveal a third are isolating alone, and has launched [Locked Down Alone](#), to help those feeling lonely - it features first-hand accounts from women who are isolating without anyone else. More widely, many titles are publishing articles about funny isolation 'fails' to encourage a feeling that we're all in this together.

That said, there appears to be a sustained appetite for advice and tips from inspiring people with unique and often quirky talents, from the NHS nurse teaching [calligraphy](#) to the expert up-cycler sharing her DIY [tie-dye](#) tutorial. However, good old celebrity news continues to grab headlines, regardless of any link to the current pandemic. [Jesy Nelson and Chris Hughes's split](#) was covered by the majority of lifestyle titles this week, as was the [launch of Phillip Schofield's own range of box wines](#).

Looking at men's lifestyle publications, GQ has launched [GQ Happy Hour](#), a new weekly Instagram Live series which follows a similar format to those already launched by its female counterparts. The new chat show will feature guests from the worlds of culture, style, sport and politics, as well as interactive content to help viewers keep busy through isolation.

Part 5: Earned media in a coronavirus world (cont'd)

BROADCAST

Broadcast continues to be a trusted source for coronavirus updates. Findings in [Ofcom's weekly survey](#) have shown people are most likely to turn to the BBC's TV, radio and online services for the latest news on the pandemic (82%), followed by other broadcasters (56%). However, it is important to recognise that no media outlet is immune to staff and programme cuts (as was seen with [Channel 4](#) last week) during this tumultuous time.

Although interview slots are largely dominated by Q&As with health and policy ministers, there is still space for more light-hearted and uplifting guests. With Captain Tom's journey going viral, the pensioner has unsurprisingly been interviewed across most news and lifestyle shows on the national stage. Furthermore, online dating through isolation continues to be a hot trend, as was recently exemplified on a BBC News segment dedicated to the topic, that featured spokespeople and case studies.

With no immediate end in sight, new initiatives continue to develop to help those indoors. Most notably this week there was an [urgent call to broadcasters](#) to switch on the subtitles for children's TV programmes, to help improve literacy whilst away from school. The campaign from Turn on the Subtitles (TOTS), has been backed by numerous credible names (such as Stephen Fry), and shows that broadcast is not only being viewed as an essential information hub but an influential one too.

TRADES

The pandemic continues to impact the trade media with titles across all industries furloughing staff. Those we know of this week include:

- **Automotive:** [Autonomous Vehicle International](#), [Automotive Interiors World](#), [Automotive Testing Technology International](#), [Engine + Powertrain Technology International](#), [Professional Motorsport World](#), [Tire Technology International](#)
- **AV and electronics:** [Installation & AV Technology](#), [New Electronics](#)
- **Legal:** [Legal Business](#) has suspended production for the foreseeable future
- **Building and housing:** [Modern Building Services](#) and [24 Housing](#) have both ceased trading
- **Public sector:** [LAPV - Local Authority Plant & Vehicle](#)

The HR and healthcare trades are still focused on covering news in relation to coronavirus due to their obvious connection to the issue, offering advice on [managing a workforce during a pandemic](#) and updates on [the production of vital medical equipment](#).

Security news continued to gain traction within the tech titles, such as Computer World, Computer Business Review and Information Age, covering trends in [phishing scams](#), [patching](#) and [new cyber security platforms](#). Within the fintech titles, launches on [digital receipts](#) and [money transfers products](#) secured space.

Meanwhile, every news story within [Real Business](#) this week was linked to the pandemic, while the only story on Management Today to secure cut-through was on [diversity and inclusion](#).

Part 5: Earned media in a coronavirus world (cont'd)

OUTTAKES

As the nation awaits an exit strategy, we've seen brands continue to battle to make headlines and secure space on the news pages. But once the Government's plan is revealed, we expect quick-thinking brands to accelerate their comms into the next phase.

1. Brand initiatives start to take flight - but they aren't all landing in earned media

- Having now had time to create, plan and execute coronavirus related initiatives, we can expect to see a rise in the number of brands getting their first phase of content out the door
- This week, [Hellman's Instagram partnership with Tommy Fury](#) went live, [ASOS's new line of NHS charity t-shirts and hoodies](#) were revealed, and a partnership between [Kurt Geiger and ES Magazine](#) particularly caught our eye

2. Fresh perspectives on coping through isolation – media are keen to uncover different outlooks

- Former hostages held captive in the middle east shared their isolation survival tips on ITV's Good Morning Britain (also covered by [national press](#)). [Stylist](#) shared tips for dealing with coronavirus induced anxiety from someone who lives with the condition and in a recent opinion piece on [The Guardian](#), someone who spent 10 years in a psychiatric ward explains how they cope under lockdown

3. The TikTok takeover – it's not just an outlet for fun, but also a powerful marketing tool

- Thanks to TikTok's dance challenges, The Weeknd's song Blinding Lights is now one of [the most streamed songs](#), with over 64 million listeners on Spotify.
- As the Olympic Games were postponed, Team GB athletes will be recreating the tournament's festivities from their own homes for the [#IsolationGames](#). The platform will support fundraising efforts for the British Red Cross, the official charity partner of Team GB

4. The return of #ad

- While celebrity collabs are light on the earned media front, we've started to see a lot more sponsored content appear, particularly promoting new films that are having to be released on the small screen
- SkyTV enlisted the help of parenting influencer and radio presenter [Mother Pukka](#) to promote the launch of Trolls 2 whilst the likes of Millie Mackintosh, Zoe Sugg and Binky Felstead all posted a series of Instagram stories driving their followers to magician Dynamo's new show, Beyond Belief

5. Thinking beyond the pandemic

- As demonstrated by this piece in [The Telegraph](#), the business media are increasingly eager to hear about how companies from a multitude of sectors plan to reopen as restrictions lift in a post coronavirus world
- Similar to EasyJet's strategy, Wizz Air expects to run services two thirds full. Meanwhile, in the restaurant industry, the Michelin-starred Pied a Terre is making plans to drastically reduce choice and send menus to customers in advance of their booking to save the company time and money