

Diversity: can it pay a digital dividend?

The media and communications industries have some of the [worst records for diversity](#) or social mobility and journalism is just about [the worst of all](#). So it was great to hear so many top media folk talking about some impressive new initiatives with such enthusiasm at a session led by Baroness Bow (Oona King) at Channel 4.



'He Loves Me' – a video made by HatchTV, part of Shine's diversity initiative

I was particularly impressed by [the Hatch](#) scheme at Shine and the desire for a joined up approach through the [Creative Diversity Network](#).

Here at Polis we have always been interested in diversity in the broadest sense. How it can help improve journalism by reflecting the diversity of modern societies as well as the diversity of networked media. In my book ['SuperMedia'](#) I talked optimistically about how the narrow editorial range of traditional news media could be broadened if it connects to – and fosters – the emerging journalisms that we see in new media social networks.

Next month we hope to publish [a research paper](#) that suggests that journalists can use social media to tap into much more diverse sources for stories and information, for example.

Big Bad Trends

But the big trends are working against diversity. Jobs are being professionalised and that favours the middle-classes who can access the best education. In media it's even worse as a system where work experience and internships are the first rung on the ladder means people with wealthier (and London-based) parents will get a head-start.

As former broadcasting exec Stewart Purvis from City University said at the Channel 4 seminar, there are about 300+ people going into journalism from his post-grad courses and very few are from 'diverse backgrounds'. Likewise at the LSE. We don't have vocational courses, but last year the number of students from where I work that went into media and communications industries doubled. LSE students come from a rich variety of backgrounds, but they are not particularly socially or ethnically 'diverse'.

How can a few Corporate Social Responsibility schemes counter that?

Some Diverse Thoughts

I would make four points, the first of which is a bit of a chippy, facile remark.

1. Social mobility takes leadership. The BBC has just appointed a swathe of new, talented leaders and yet almost all of them are privately-educated, Oxbridge folk. That doesn't feel like an organisation that wants a culture of diversity to spread. If we want true social mobility then someone has to lose out – relatively – and we have to change the rules of the game.
2. We need more evidence of how the new networked digital creative environment can produce greater diversity. If it's doesn't (and remember Mark Zuckerberg came from Harvard...) then that's as interesting as the failure of traditional media to be diverse.
3. We need more evidence of the business case for diversity. I have always argued that it makes good economic sense for media businesses to tap into more diverse audiences and that happens more easily if you have diverse producers. Doesn't it?
4. Can we learn lessons from the venture capital industry's approach to innovation around social media and entertainment? Dr Dre's business has just been valued at more than \$1 billion. How did that happen? Shouldn't we be promoting diversity for profit rather than political correctness?

Other thoughts welcome.

- Copyright © 2014 London School of Economics and Political Science