

Aligning Content Analysis with Journalism: A Better Path to Public Relations Success



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Before I conducted Public Relations [research](#) and evaluation, I worked in Paris for national news and specialized media outlets as a freelance journalist. Since my day-to-day work consisted of collecting, checking, compiling and commenting on facts, I found that Research occupied most of my time and that Public Relations professionals rarely anticipated my needs as a journalist.

When I attended press conferences or events, I was handed generic booklets and impersonal press releases. I rarely used this information, as the content they supplied was irrelevant to what my audience actually wanted to read.

In my experience, Public Relations professionals understand the importance of earned media to achieve their goals, which most of the time means raising awareness about a particular organisation, product or topic. They seek to use storytelling to grab the imagination, as journalists do to report news. For this reason, a better understanding of the selection criteria and research processes in journalism is essential to identify

story ideas, manage information outflow and arrange meaningful opportunities for journalists to interact with relevant sources.

With today's content-gathering technology, automated coding systems and human analysis, Public Relations professionals have the ability to rely on data science to drive the success of their communication skills. They now have the potential to decipher content, translate facts into understandable insights and provide journalists with the storytelling aspects of data.

Here are three lessons I learned from my experiences as a journalist and as a Public Relations research and evaluation professional:

1. Certain media favor certain types of story. Research can show the preferences of media and individual journalists, to help professional communicators target them more efficiently. In the example below, British tabloids such as the Daily Express, the Daily Star and the Daily Mail garner significant interest around migration-related topics, while broadsheets show a particular emphasis on economic and financial subjects. In this way, content analysis helps uncover messaging and targeting opportunities to improve efficiency and performance.

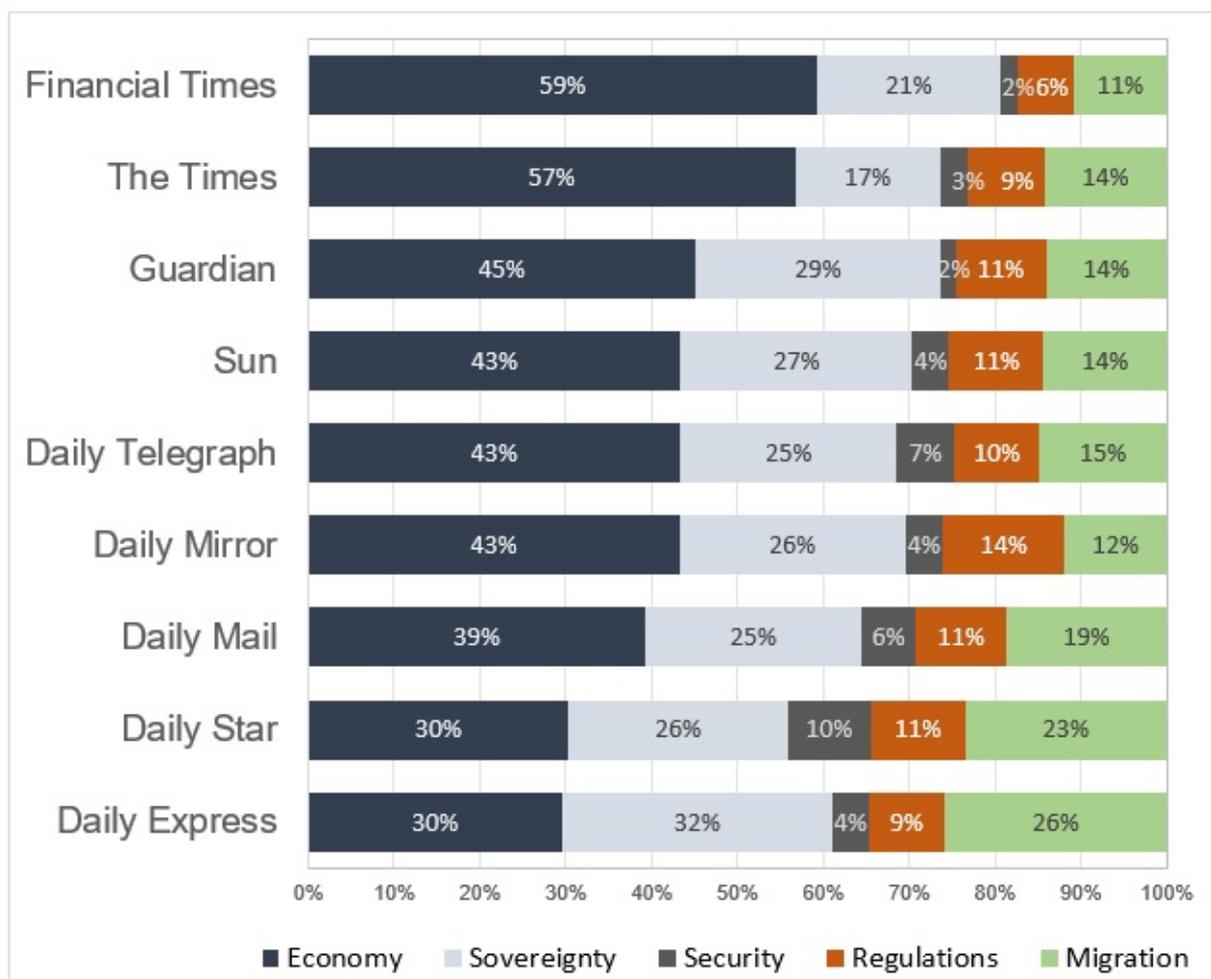


Figure 1: Share-of-message using each argument voiced during the EU Referendum campaign.

2. Journalists value the communicator's ability to anticipate their needs. A media analysis of competing positions can uncover trends that indicate reporting tendencies among certain media and journalists. While some British newspapers delivered relatively balanced coverage towards the "pro-leave" and "remain" campaigns during the EU referendum, the Daily Mirror and the Daily Express positioned themselves more absolutely. Combining positioning with reach enables public relations professionals to target the most receptive media and the highest reach media for greatest efficiency.

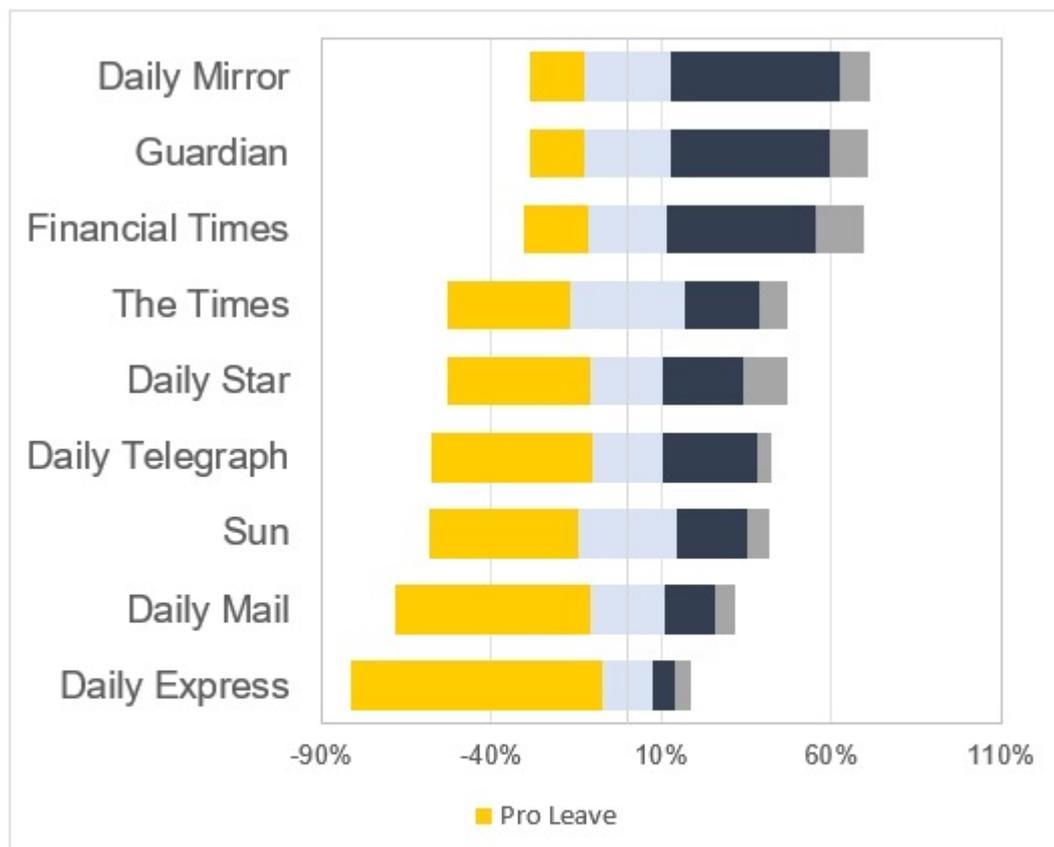


Figure 2: Media orientation during the EU Referendum campaign.

*Base: 2,378 articles used the Reuters Institute study into the UK press coverage surrounding the EU Referendum.

3. While there are obvious gaps, newspapers generally both shape and reflect public opinion.

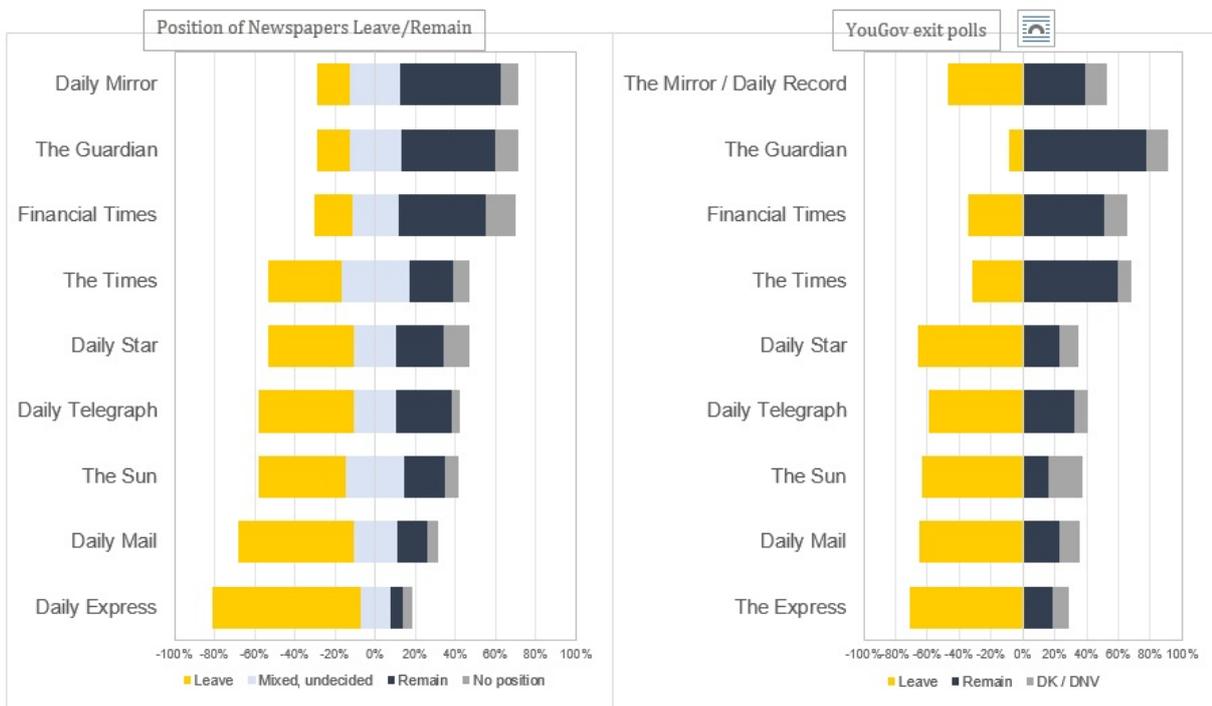


Figure 3: Newspaper articles classified by leave/remain positions compared to YouGov voter exit polls organized by newspaper readership during the EU Referendum. Whether for leaving or remaining, the press expressed a stronger position than their readers. For public relations professionals, media analysis combined with survey and polling data present a more complete picture of what works and what does not work in shaping the attitudes and behaviour of target audiences.

Further, I offer four examples of how public relations research supports better communications decision-making:

1. A review of content trends reveals that certain story types work best on a seasonal basis. Trends may also reveal when one campaign is in decline, such that another may be launched to maintain consistency over time. Again, narrower segmentation and tailored messaging on recurring themes will produce smarter Public Relations.

Come up with answers to questions like:

- Is my message likely to get more exposure during weekends, during the summer, during national celebrations?
- Should I launch my product before, during or after a big event?
- How frequently should I reiterate my message to the media?

2. Self-assessment within a Public Relations department can help determine whether the company or brand can deliver certain messages credibly. If not, Public Relations leadership must align with the executive board to determine what the organisation needs to do to align their messages with what journalists and the marketplace find most interesting in a timely manner (either **deemphasize** the message or **elevate** the company's ability to deliver the message credibly).
3. Once the media analysis is complete, ask journalists directly about the way they prefer to prepare and report. For example, journalists prefer getting a few "exclusive" words from top executives rather than using the elements provided to the wider media scene via press releases. Understanding individual journalists' preferences helps relationship-building with the press, and lays a foundation for public relations success.
4. Journalists prefer to interview executives rather than Public Relations professionals. As such, proactive Public Relations departments, with the support of responsive, accessible executives, helps to ensure that company and brand stories effectively deliver key messages, and that positive messaging balances any negative stories while reinforcing positive ones.

Research-based insights foster more fruitful relationships between Public Relations practitioners and media professionals. Data exploration trends have only strengthened over the past decade with marketing and Public Relations teams consistently driven by new approaches to attitudinal research, content analysis and analytic tools.

As a Public Relations Practitioner, your ongoing research tasks will augmented by research in the forms of surveys and content analysis. These forms of research helps to refine better orientate your effort for more compelling and credible

results. Instead of “killing creativity,” as many communicators fear, research acts as a foundation for creativity to deliver more meaningful communications and business results.

About the Author: Jennifer Sanchis is a Senior Account Executive delivering research-based insights and guidance for PRIME Research office in Oxford in the United Kingdom. She provides specialized expert analysis for international clients.