



April 4 2017

Dear Editor

Will Hutton ("Are we finally reacting to the disruptive supremacy of Facebook and Google?" 26.03.2017) could have also ranked the invention of the internet alongside the Gutenberg printing press which democratised the making available of man's creative spirit and wish to be widely read and rewarded for his endeavour. The internet is an outstanding demonstration of man's talent to reach for the stars and innovate. It enriches us all. But it is not a force of nature – it is a creation of mankind.

Professional press publishers now find soaring popularity for professionally produced news, comment and debate by professional journalists online. But remuneration for them is elusive whereas soaring revenues go more easily to dominant, vertically integrated platforms and aggregators which help themselves to press content through automated and systematic scraping of websites, copying vast quantities of copyright protected text, images and video which they make available to millions of citizens without any reward going back to the creators and producers of that content, creating an illusion of everything for nothing. The European Commission has recognised that this parasitic behaviour risks the long-term impoverishment of those who invest in professional journalism, threatening jobs, titles and future innovation.

The EU Commission has proposed a remedy: to grant press publishers a neighbouring right (in their copyright reform package currently before the European Parliament) ensuring that publishers can also monetise their content. Yet those very companies that benefit today from lack of clarity around who owns the content they 'scrape' have mounted a vast lobby against this neighbouring right even though other producers of film, TV and music already benefit from this legal standing. MEPs must back this new right and make sure European creation online is rewarded and not just Silicon Valley. The internet is the arguably the most brilliant invention of our time. We must not allow it, in its unruly adolescent years, to destroy the press that is the very essence of democratic society and the livelihoods of journalists we rely on to deliver high quality diverse news and information.

Yours sincerely

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