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Trawling through the dustbins of the UK media

Russell Brand may be a soundbite on legs – but he's not about to go away

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Doesn't look so angry. Eva Rinaldi, CC BY-SA

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Well, we've been here before. On Wednesday, the comedian, author and activist Russell Brand threatened to sue *The Sun* after the newspaper ran a front-page feature labelling Brand a hypocrite for “ranting against high rents and tax avoidance” while paying “£76k a year to tax-dodge landlords”.

Its editorial then witheringly referred to Brand's current status: he is, the *Sun* contended: “swept up in a vortex of conspiracy paranoia and clichéd leftie propaganda which he's read somewhere and only half understood ... He is a vacuous soundbite on legs.”

If Brand decides to sue *The Sun* (and it is questionable on what grounds he has a case – though legal expert David Banks told the *Huffington Post* that he could potentially have a claim as accusations of hypocrisy can be libellous in some circumstances) it will be the second time in recent history that he



Branding Russell Brand. The Sun

has had recourse to the law against Britain's most famous tabloid.

In May this year he accepted an undisclosed sum from the Sun on Sunday which admitted in the High Court that its story claiming he had been cheating on his girlfriend, Jemima Khan, was totally untrue, defamatory and shouldn't have been published.



Russell Brand
@rustyrocks

I got some money suing The S*n who lied about me. I am making a donation to the #JFT96 campaign. A tiny piece of justice.

11.7K 2:51 PM - Apr 15, 2014

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In victory, Brand tweeted: "I got some money suing The Sun who lied about me. I am making a donation to the #JFT96 campaign. A tiny piece of justice."

'Hippo-sized lies'

The "war" between Brand and The Sun has been going on for some time. When The Sun printed the original claims about Brand's infidelities in November 2013, Brand responded by penning, in typically decorative prose, a wonderful take-down of the paper's activities. He referred to the "worst lies" – of Hillsborough, Milly Dowler and swan-eating asylum seekers.

In the Guardian he wrote: "We will never know the true extent of their dishonesty. We are dealing with experts in propaganda who will stop at nothing to see their version of events prevail, and on the rare occasions when the truth emerges, like a hernia popping through gorged corpse, they apologise discreetly for their ignoble flatulence in a mouse-sized font for hippo-sized lies."

The Guardian piece so enraged The Sun that it took down its paywall so that non-subscribers could be party to "20 Reasons Why Russell Brand is the Biggest Hypocrite in Britain". Among other things, the article points out the fact that the "Booky Wookies" of the three-times winner of the "shagger of the year" awards are published by News Corp companies.

Perhaps what irked The Sun the most was that Brand has frequently written for the paper and has edited its notorious "Bizarre" column. One source told the Guido Fawkes political blog: "He's written countless pieces for us, I think the last was in May this year, so clearly he didn't have an issue over Hillsborough then!"

Fox in the stocks

More recently Brand has aimed his fire at Fox News. His YouTube web series (The Trews – the truth about the news – now running to more than 200 episodes) has asked: “Is Fox News more dangerous than ISIS?”, as well as: “Does Fox News want us to be Nazis?” and “Why Does Fox news love guns so much?”

Bill O’Reilly, Fox News’s most visible and voluble newscaster, has been repeatedly singled out for criticism. Attacked for his supposed stupidity and bigotry Brand has stated : “Bill O’Reilly’s message is the same as Rupert Murdoch’s, the same as Fox News’s and the establishment’s, ‘Things are ok the way we are, we will stay in charge.’”

Brand is certainly not afraid to take on Murdoch personally, either. Having previously referred to Murdoch’s “glabrous claw” and The Sun as a tiny part of the “demon’s dermatology” the very latest Trews this week draws attention to Murdoch and tax.



Mainstream Media Corruption Is Killing People: Russell Brand T...



Dem’s fighting words.

But Brand rails against the whole media system, not just the Murdoch empire. A media system which, in his eyes, ensures the continued existence of the status quo and the propagation of the views of the narrow elite. This is hardly original criticism, of course, but the fact that Brand has chosen to air his beliefs through his books, journalism and broadcasts is something that has clearly upset not just the right wing but also some on the traditional left of the media who you might think would welcome the intervention of someone so down with the (supposedly disaffected) “kids” and in tune with their own views.

The often antagonistic but always worthwhile Media Lens, whose *raison d’être* is to challenge the corporate media system with a view to instigating a more honest and compassionate world, helpfully

catalogued and analysed journalistic responses to the publication of Brand's call to arms, **Revolution**.

Bête noire – and loving it

What is most shocking in the examples provided is not so much the volume of criticism that routinely comes Brand's way but rather the superior tones with which that criticism is expressed. Media Lens highlights the comments of the Observer's Nick Cohen: "His writing is atrocious: long-winded, confused and smug; filled with references to books Brand has half read and thinkers he has half understood."

The New Statesman's Sarah Ditum condemned the man, the message and the audience: "Russell Brand, clown that he is, is taken seriously by an awful lot of young men who see any criticism of the cartoon messiah's misogyny as a derail from 'the real issues' (whatever they are)."

For all the criticism of Brand's style and his failure to articulate the finer points of how his revolution will work, he is at least opening up debate and challenging the mainstream views. For me, he is quite simply a force for good who uses activism to highlight the causes of the under-represented and disenfranchised. Look at the basis for the current furore – Brand was out on the streets marching in support of Hoxton's New Era Estate residents and affordable properties.

What is unique about him – and he will be the first of many, I'll wager – is that he doesn't need the conventional media to support him. He can take on Murdoch and the Daily Mail because his voice is not limited to their platforms. He can respond to the "hypocrite" accusations within hours online and hundreds and thousands will watch it. He tweets to nearly 9m followers, broadcasts via YouTube and writes best-selling books. He is not going to go away.

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