

The Sun

(18 December 2013)



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Component 1: Exploring the Media

Focus areas:
Media Language
Representation
Media Industries
Audiences
Media Contexts

BACKGROUND CONTEXT

- *The Sun* is a British tabloid daily newspaper owned by Rupert Murdoch's News Corp.
- It was originally published six days a week until News Corp. also started producing *The Sun on Sunday* in February 2012 to replace the *News of the World*.
- With an average daily circulation of roughly 1.6 million copies of their print edition in the UK and a daily readership of around 4.1 million (<http://www.newsworks.org.uk/The-Sun>), *The Sun* has the largest circulation of any daily print newspaper in the United Kingdom. In addition, *The Sun on Sunday* is the UK's biggest selling Sunday newspaper.
- 18th December is International Migrants Day. A day where the UN encourages the world to acknowledge the importance of immigrants.
- Just days before this front page, a YouGov Poll revealed that 42% of their responders said immigration was the key area where Britain needed to win back power from Brussels.
- Britain ultimately voted to leave the EU on June 23rd 2016 – Brexit – and it is believed that many people voted this way due to their feelings about immigration.

PART 1: STARTING POINTS – Media language

Historical and Cultural Contexts:

The Sun started life as a broadsheet in 1964, becoming a **tabloid** in 1969 after being purchased by its current owners. Sex was an important feature of the paper's marketing strategy and the first topless

page 3 model appeared in November 1970. This soon became a regular feature of the paper and has been an area of contention for some people.

The Sun has always been considered **controversial** in terms of its output, partly due to its over-reliance on sensational news and partly due to complete fabrication for the sake of a story ("Freddie Star Ate My Hamster", 1986).

The most notable controversy was *The Sun's* coverage of the **Hillsborough** Football Stadium disaster in Sheffield on 15th April 1989, in which 96 people died. The paper ran a front page headline of "The Truth" and printed allegations that fans pickpocketed victims, urinated on members of the emergency services and assaulted a policeman who was administering the kiss of life to a victim. The story was seemingly based on allegations from anonymous sources that were later proved to be false and The Sun apologised. The front page caused **outrage** in Liverpool where it was soon titled "*The Scum*" and a significant proportion of the city's population still boycott the paper today with many shops even refusing to stock it.

Consider codes and conventions and how media language communicates meanings:

- The **dominant image** is of some red tape put across a world map, separating the UK from the rest of Europe. This is **anchored** by the **headline**, "Draw a red line on immigration or else!"
- The **red tape** with the white strip going through it is reminiscent of the St George Cross, which is part of the English flag. Subconsciously then, this image **connotes patriotism, nationalism** and all things English.
- 'Red tape' is also an **idiom** for bureaucracy and, since joining the EU, people often talk about 'cutting the EU red tape' relating to the restrictions on how things should be done in the European Union. This visual image could be viewed as referencing this.
- The **main headline**, although seemingly directed at the Prime Minister, has a very **informal register**. The use of the **imperative** and "or

else!” at the end is both inappropriate and disrespectful to the leader of a country. However, it is arguably perfect for the intended audience who may feel they need to shout to be heard.

- In the bottom left corner, The Sun has selected a **close up shot of the Prime Minister** in which he looks both tired and stressed. This shot will have been selected from numerous images, probably none of which have been taken in connection with this article, perhaps to show how difficult a job he has trying to balance the views of the country with the responsibilities he has as a member of the EU.
- The **opening to the article** can be seen on the left third of the cover beginning, “The Sun says...” as if the newspaper has any real weighting when it comes to the decisions the Prime Minister makes. The **language** in the article is **emotive** at times, describing immigration as “the flood”, as something unwanted and destructive.
- **The article continues** by issuing an **ultimatum**, another inappropriate way to address the head of state, that if he isn’t able to get power back from the EU to stop immigration, the readers will likely vote out of the EU altogether at the referendum. There is no evidence to suggest that is what the people of Britain have said they would do and, by including this, the newspaper was perhaps subtly planting the seed for how readers should vote if they felt strongly about immigration.
- The **masthead** is in block, capitalised text and uses the colours red and white. Other newspapers in the UK also use this design (such as *The Mirror*, *The Daily Star* and the *Daily Sport*) and these are termed “red tops” as they specialise in tabloid journalism – journalism that often relies on sensationalism, celebrities and gossip.
- The masthead also displays an advert for money off at Aldi supermarket. This voucher offer is in keeping with the **demographic of the target audience** who are mainly lower middle class and below. It may also be a way to target new readers, anyone who is looking to save money.

Possible areas for further investigation are:

- **Code and conventions of newspaper covers:** layout, use of cover photographs/ images, house style, mastheads.
- Roland Barthes **enigma codes** - headlines used to tease people to want to read certain stories.

PART 2: STARTING POINTS – Representation

Historical and Political Contexts:

In its early years, *The Sun* nominally supported the Labour party but has moved back and forth between Labour and the Conservatives, depending on party leadership. The paper has always been very vocal in telling its readers how they should vote (“Why it must be labour” 1970; “Vote Tory this time” 1979; “Do you really want this old fool to run Britain?” 1983).

Today, *The Sun* is described as having **political allegiance** to the **Conservative party** and does not support the EU, so it is not surprising that the language of this main articles seeks to apportion blame to the EU, suggesting they are the reason for such high levels of immigration. It might be helpful then to compare this cover with another from the left-wing press, such as *The Guardian* which often provides a more supportive view of migrants.

Consider the representation of immigration as an issue:

- The cover has been produced based on a **YouGov poll** where 42% of the responders said they thought Britain should be able to limit immigration from the EU, and also on their own **Sun poll** – the results of which are not reported on this cover. **The Sun’s cover interprets** this information as all of its readers want a blanket ban on immigration, which is not wholly accurate and so some people have argued that this front cover is xenophobic.
- The fact the newspaper has chosen to name only **two other countries on the map**, could suggest where *The Sun* imagines the main ‘**threat**’ is coming from – Bulgaria and Romania.
- The way in which *The Sun* has constructed this immigration narrative serves to perpetuate the **negative stereotype of migrants** as people to be feared, potential terrorists, benefit scroungers and criminals.
- The **text of the main article** is carefully constructed to **position the audience** into wholly accepting the newspaper’s viewpoint, analysis and opinion.
 - » The use of **direct address**, “you tell him” and the collective term, “The British people” ensures that the readers feel a part of this so-called demand on the PM and therefore also assume this **viewpoint on immigration**.
 - » The **issue** of immigration is complex and often divides people, some considering the UK to be at capacity and unable to

accept more, some seeing the benefits that immigrants bring to society. However, the **selection of images and corresponding text** means that readers are positioned to agree that immigration is a bad thing and needs to be stopped.

PART 3: STARTING POINTS – Media Industries

Consider the importance of funding

- Increasingly newspapers earn revenue from their **advertisements** and so, in this sense, journalism is being seen more and more as a **commodity** whose purpose is predominantly for profit. £1 in every £7 spent on groceries is spent by a *Sun* reader making it a very attractive advertising vehicle.
- As **readership figures of print news continue to drop** and advertisers choosing to leave if figures drop too low, newspapers are under **increasing pressure to capture audiences**, so the purpose of the dominant image and the main article is to sell papers.
- In the first quarter of 2016 *The Sun* recorded more than **£250 million in losses** predominantly through loss of publishing rights but also due to having to set aside another £50 million to cover legal costs and pay-offs for the ongoing phone-hacking scandal. This scandal has previously cost News Corp. £366 million.

Consider the impact of technologies, and convergence:

- In August 2013, *The Sun* launched Sun+, a **subscription service digital entertainment package**. Subscribers paid £2 per week but were able to access all of *The Sun's* regular content as well as have exclusive access to Premier League clips, a variety of digital rewards and a lottery. Despite the cost of this, Sun+ had 117,000 **subscribers** who they could **engage** with on a more personal level due to the **brand loyalty** created from the subscription. This was just one of the ways *The Sun* adapted to people's reading habits, with people now having little time to spare and increasingly 'reading on the go'.
- However, in November 2015, the paper had to remove the paywall and offer most of its web content for free in order to compete with major rivals such as *The Mail Online*. Since removal of the paywall, it now has around 1 million browsers per day.

PART 4: STARTING POINTS – Audiences

Consider target audiences:

- *The Sun* targets the **middle social classes**, most of whom haven't attended higher education. Two thirds of its readers are over 35 years old, 54% are male and its biggest audience share comes from the C2DE demographic.
- According to www.see-a-voice.org, the average reading age of the UK population is 9 years old. *The Sun* has a reading age of 8 years. Use of words in bold, lots of visuals and smaller chunks of text means they are purposefully making their product **accessible to everyone** and especially appealing to members of our society who have **weaker literacy skills**.
- In addition, this way of formatting makes it easier to read at speed – on the daily commute for example - and to skim and scan the paper to find specific articles that interest you. This could help explain why *The Sun* is "**Britain's most popular paper**" as stated by its tagline, as it is an easy read.

Consider theoretical perspectives:

- **Active/Passive audience.** Historically, readers of print newspapers were considered to be passive (i.e. they read what was in front of them and believed it), especially as there is an expectation that what is shared in the news genre is true. However, today's audiences are much more active and understand how tabloids often don't report full facts. This potentially changes the way they interpret the information they are given.