

Component 1: Exploring the Media

Focus areas:

Media language

Representation

Media industries

Audiences

Media contexts

THE PRODUCT

- *The Sun* is a British tabloid daily newspaper owned by News UK, a subsidiary of right-wing, Australian-born American media baron Rupert Murdoch's News Corp.
- It was originally published six days a week until News Corp also started producing *The Sun on Sunday* in 2012.
- *The Sun* has an average daily print circulation of roughly 1.3 million copies in the UK and a daily readership of around 2.3 million (<https://www.hurstmediacompany.co.uk/the-sun-profile/>). *The Sun* stopped releasing its circulation figures in 2020.
- News Corp describe *The Sun* as, “an instigator, an entertainer, a cultural reference point, a finger on the pulse, a daily relationship.” The format of the print paper is tabloid, and it is colloquially known as a ‘red top’.
- The majority of its print audience is male, C2DE and aged between 35–64 years old.
- In a recent YouGov survey (<https://yougov.co.uk/topics/media/explore/newspaper/TheSun>), 97% of people surveyed had heard of *The Sun*, but only 29% liked it.

PART 1: STARTING POINTS – Media language

Consider codes and conventions and how media language communicates meanings:

- The masthead is in block text and uses the colours red and white. Other newspapers in the UK, such as *The Mirror*, *The Sunday People* and *The Daily Star*, all use this design. These are

termed ‘red tops’ as they specialise in tabloid journalism – journalism that often relies on sensationalism, celebrities, and gossip. Tabloids are also renowned for simplifying complex political issues.

- The headline “Join our jabs army” uses an imperative to call readers to action, asking them to volunteer as a steward at the vaccination centres. The choice of the term “army” for the campaign frames Covid as a common, tangible enemy that the readers can help defeat. The use of military language for a medical story is typical of tabloids, who often use it in sports stories too. The use of “our” connotes that *The Sun* is a proactive, dynamic paper that is helping the country.
- The puff “Jabs army” is in the shape of a heart, with a Union Flag image, making it appear like a badge the volunteers might receive or a logo they might wear to connect them to the scheme. The heart juxtaposes the term army, but it connotes that the group’s actions will be caring and generous. The flag also implies that helping to ‘fight’ covid is a matter of national pride and patriotism.
- The main image is a photoshopped picture of the clock face on the Elizabeth Tower (also known as Big Ben). This is an iconic symbol of British culture and would be recognised by most of the audience, especially on 1st January when many people would have heard Big Ben tolling at midnight to bring in the new year. The designer has replaced the clock hand with a syringe, which highlights that this story is about vaccinations. The needle pointing to 12 is an indication of the new year arriving, whilst also suggesting to the audience that time is of the greatest importance when it comes to distributing the vaccination. This sense of urgency is reinforced in the body copy of the article, “help get millions vaccinated rapidly”.
- The pull quotes have been carefully chosen to appeal to *The Sun*’s mainstreamer audience. Gary Lineker and Kate Garraway are trusted celebrities with personal experiences of Covid-19 within their families, which have been widely reported in the press. Each quote serves a different purpose for the paper. Lineker is

praising the campaign itself, therefore giving it his endorsement. Meanwhile Garraway's is more emotive and personal, "I see Covid up close with my Derek", using collective pronouns to create a sense of positivity and relatability, "let's all club together".

- The opening to the article is on the right third of the cover, and it begins with "The Sun says...", suggesting the newspaper has real influence and reinforces their strength of opinion on this matter. The standfirst uses flattery, "our fantastic readers", to encourage the audience to get involved in the campaign. Later in the article, they build a sense of community with the use of collective pronouns, "us" and "we", whilst the continued use of direct address "YOU" reinforces the jingoistic tone of the headline.
- The off-lead story positioned in the masthead pictures the Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, with his thumbs up. This image connotes positivity and optimism. The byline indicates that this is a political story and will involve the government. This is supported by the headline "PM: Britain Brexpects", which is an intertextual link to two historical British leaders, Churchill and Nelson. By aligning Johnson with these two people, it is clear *The Sun's* ideology in this article is pro-Johnson and pro-Brexit.

Possible areas for further investigation are:

- **Codes and conventions of newspaper covers** – layout, use of cover photographs/images, house style, mastheads. Emotive vs. formal language to engage different audience responses.
- **Roland Barthes enigma codes** – headlines used to tease people to want to read certain stories.

PART 2: STARTING POINTS – Contexts and representations

Social, historical and political contexts:

- COVID-19 is a global pandemic. The disease was first identified in December 2019, before the pandemic was declared in March 2020.
- It was clear that a mass immunisation programme was essential to help prevent the

spread of the disease. At the start of 2020, the world saw unprecedented levels of funding for vaccine research and development (R&D). By December 2020, the UK became the first western country to license a vaccine against Covid, which is astonishingly fast given that, on average, a vaccine usually takes 10–15 years to accomplish. By January 2021, the NHS had delivered more than 1 million vaccinations, colloquially known as jabs.

- On 23 June 2016, citizens of the UK voted to leave the European Union. This was nicknamed 'Brexit'. The vote was very close with 51.9% voting leave and 48.1% voting remain. Boris Johnson was a figurehead of the Leave campaign, which *The Sun* newspaper supported.
- During World War Two, Winston Churchill gave a rallying speech in which he quoted Horatio Nelson, "England expects that every man will do his duty". This was slightly altered to "Britain expects that you too, this day will do your duty" on a World War Two poster and has now become a much-quoted phrase in the tabloid press.
- Kate Garraway is a popular TV broadcaster in the UK, having co-hosted *Good Morning Britain* since 2014, and appearing on numerous shows from *Strictly Come Dancing* to *I'm A Celebrity, Get Me Out of Here*. Her husband, Derek Draper, was left seriously ill after contracting Covid-19.
- Gary Lineker is a former England footballer and now a popular sports presenter on BBC's Match of the Day. He has 8.5 million followers on Twitter. In April 2020, he donated £140,000 to the British Red Cross emergency response to the Coronavirus crisis in the UK.
- 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. Today, *The Sun* is described as having political allegiance to the Conservative party and does not support the EU. The paper has always been very vocal in telling its readers how they should act, whether voting, during lockdown or getting vaccinated. For example, "Boris ticks all the boxes" in 2019,

“Stay home” in 2020 and “As 1.5M miss vax... don’t blow it Britain!” in 2021.

- During the pandemic, news media played a crucial role in communicating public health and policy information. Traditional newspaper coverage and representations of issues were important amidst increasing disinformation and conspiracy theories spread online.
- Militaristic language is so embedded in the government and media’s representation of the medical world that this has come to be normalised by audiences. Hospitals are the ‘frontline’, healthcare workers are ‘heroes’ and we ‘fight’ and ‘battle’ disease.
- The vaccine rollout began in December 2020 and worked in phases, prioritising the population according to vulnerability and age. The UK’s rollout was among the fastest in the world.

Consider the representation of events and issues:

- Covid-19 is represented as an enemy on this front cover with media language framing the pandemic as a war. In line with their previous representations of the pandemic, Covid is a disease to “conquer”. Such language is used in this context to motivate and inspire action in the audience, encouraging them to join the “Jabs army”. The idea that Covid is an invader is reinforced with *The Sun*’s use of nationalistic imagery, including the Union Flag and Big Ben.
- Getting vaccinated is represented as a positive action by *The Sun*. This is clear in their repeated call for readers to support the roll out of vaccinations, “Join our jabs army”. By encouraging the public to join their campaign they are supporting the vaccination programme, making it clear that when the reader’s age group is allowed to get vaccinated, they should. The use of endorsements, along with ‘The Sun says...’ implies the reader should trust its viewpoint. Getting vaccinated is represented as a matter of urgency with the combined use of the clock face, imperative verbs, and terms such as “rapidly”.
- Brexit is represented positively in the off lead. *The Sun* suggests this political decision

has brought “newfound freedom” to the UK, while terms such as “heralded” and “dawn” imply Britain has a great future away from the EU. This is in line with *The Sun*’s pro-leave, isolationist ideology.

Section B

PART 3: STARTING POINTS – Media industries

Industry context:

- Newspapers used to be hugely profitable, but the industry was not prepared for the arrival of the internet in the 1990s. Premium news was given away for free, and publishers didn’t take control of advertising, opening up a gap for Google and Facebook to fill. As a result, the modern business of news is in relentless decline. The bulk of advertising income is now hoovered up by Google and Facebook and newspapers have had to make significant cuts to their costs, including staff. Over the past decade, media groups have tried various strategies to boost their revenues, from subscription (e.g. *The Times*) and membership (e.g. *The Guardian*) models, to relying solely on advertising and diversification (e.g. *The Sun*).
- Newspapers are self-regulated, with editors expected to follow the Editors’ Code of Practice. If readers find any content in breach of this code, they may complain to the Independent Press Standards Organisation (IPSO).

Consider the nature of media production, including by large organisations, who own the products they produce, and by individuals and groups:

Newspaper production consists of a series of stages, each overseen by the newspaper’s editor.

Pre-press includes:

- Newsgathering – the editor sets the agenda for the paper, ideas are generated by journalists, stories are written, photographs are taken, and the editor signs off on stories.
- Advertising – the sales team sells space in the newspaper and on the website to brands looking to promote themselves.

- Design – the newspaper is laid out by a page designer, arranging stories and advertising according to guidelines set by the editor and advertising teams.

Press includes:

- Publishing – after editorial sign-off, the paper is published on paper or online.
- Distribution – the finished print paper is sent to newsagents and supermarkets. The digital paper is distributed on *The Sun* app, meanwhile digital stories are pushed-out to Apple News and social media platforms.

Areas for further research:

- The newspaper, owner, editor, writers, photographers, designers – exploration of these roles, their position and impact in the production process.
- Synergy with other brands and promotions in order to fund production and/or market the paper.

Consider the importance of funding:

- Print newspapers earn revenue from their advertisements and so, in this sense, journalism is being seen more and more as a commodity, whose purpose is both profit and power. £1 in every £7 spent on groceries is spent by a *Sun* reader, making it a very attractive advertising vehicle. In addition to adverts, which are obvious in their purpose, *The Sun* also features advertorials – content written by journalists, which although looking like editorial copy is actually an advert that has been paid for by the brand. An advertorial carries more weight with an audience as it seemingly has the validation of the publication and journalist.
- As circulation figures of print news continues to drop and advertisers are choosing to leave if figures drop too low, newspapers are under increasing pressure to capture audiences. Therefore, online advertising revenues for *The Sun*, as well as diversifying into different areas (e.g. Sun Vegas, Sun Bets, etc.), are essential.

Consider the impact of technologies, and convergence:

- Readers can consume all the content from the print newspaper on the website <https://www.thesun.co.uk> for free. Readers can also subscribe to a digital edition of the print newspaper for £4.99 a week. The digital edition of the print newspaper is consumed through *The Sun* app, which is available on iOS and Android devices.
- Statistics around online reach and readership can be slippery, with many newspapers (including *The Mirror* and *MailOnline*) claiming to have the biggest. From a study in 2021 (PAMCo), *The Sun* online reached 6 million people a day. However, their rivals argue it is not quantity, but quality of engagement that matters, and how long each reader spends on the site is more important. *The MailOnline* points to having 5.4 billion minutes of engagement by readers per month across print and digital, versus only 3.1 billion minutes for *The Sun*.
- To boost its engagement beyond its target audience, *The Sun* supplies free content to Apple News. The click-throughs from the UK's most popular news app supply 23% of *The Sun*'s page views.
- Readers can follow *The Sun* on social media platforms too – Facebook, Twitter, TikTok, Snapchat and Instagram. Each account offers different content to different audiences.

Areas for further research: examples of stories, adverts and *The Sun* brands to exemplify the use of technology, funding, regulation and audiences.

PART 4: STARTING POINTS – Audiences

Consider target audiences:

- *The Sun*, both online and in print, targets the lower to middle social classes with its biggest audience share coming from the C2DE demographic. Although it is very close, the majority of print and online readers are male. Most of its print readers are between 45 and 64, whereas as many as 60% of online readers are below the age of 34.

- According to ascento.co.uk, the average reading age of the UK population is 9 years old. *The Sun* has a reading age of 8 years. Using 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 or just want an easy read. This helps explain why *The Sun* is “The People’s Paper” as stated by its tagline. In addition, this way of formatting makes it easier to read at speed, on the daily commute for example, and to skim and scan to find specific articles that interest you.
- Promotions such as Sun Hols, where readers have to collect tokens, appeals to low-income demographics, whilst also building loyalty between the brand and the reader.

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, it is now understood that audiences are in fact active and read stories according to their own context, beliefs, and values. This potentially changes the way they interpret the information they are given.

Areas for further research: examples of layout and design, content, adverts, and *The Sun* brands to exemplify the different appeals to audiences.