



The Sun

(22 March 2025)

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, in part driven by the closure of the Sunday-only *News of the World* newspaper, following the phone hacking scandal.

The Sun has an average daily print circulation of roughly 1.3 million copies in the UK, and a daily readership of around 2.2 million. *The Sun* stopped releasing its circulation figures in 2020 but maintains the claim that it sells 18 copies a second (Hurst Media Company, 2020).

News Corp describe *The Sun* as, 'No longer just a news brand...but a true community anchor.' 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 and 64 years old.

A YouGov survey shows that *The Sun* is the UK's 4th most popular newspaper. 98% of people surveyed had heard of *The Sun*, but only 33% liked it.

Part 1: Starting points – Media contexts

Historical and political context

Heathrow Airport (LHR) is the UK's primary international gateway and Europe's busiest airport. It serves over 200 destinations with four active terminals (T2–T5). It is a major transport hub for passengers and cargo, open 24/7. Heathrow uses as much electricity as a small city and has three connections to the national grid. On the evening of 20 March 2025, a fire began in an electrical substation in Hayes, one of these connections. The fire caused a 16-hour closure of the airport, disrupting 270,000 passengers.



Big infrastructure is intrinsically political, whether the national grid or Heathrow airport, because of the effect it has on people's lives. By its nature it is built and/or regulated by the government. The headline is in part a reference to the power outage, but it's also a right-wing commentary on the Labour government of the day, suggesting the outage was a sign of inept management.

Social and cultural context

Fawlty Towers, a 1970s television comedy series, was named the greatest ever British sitcom by the Radio Times in 2019. Its story follows Basil Fawlty, an inept and ill-tempered hotelier, as he runs a dysfunctional hotel in the UK. The series celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2025, and in March 2025 *Fawlty Towers: The Play* had a sold-out run in London's West End. Therefore, despite being a historical reference point, which would resonate with older audiences, younger audiences would be familiar with the brand.

Kym Marsh is an English actress, singer and television presenter best known for her role as Michelle Conner on ITV soap opera *Coronation Street* (2006–2019). She is a familiar face on mainstream television, appearing in *Strictly Come Dancing* in 2022 and as the presenter of *Morning Live* on BBC One from 2020 to date. The image was taken at the British Soap Awards in 2016, 9 years before this front cover.

Across the 2020s, the UK media landscape has undergone a cultural reappraisal of women aged 50 and over, shifting from historic invisibility to an era of redefining age as a 'new prime'. This has been driven by economic power (in the UK, the over-55 demographic outspends younger groups by hundreds of billions) and a new wave of 'midlife influencers' and celebrities, including Davina McCall, Claudia Winkleman, Tess Daly and Amanda Holden.

Myles Lewis-Skelly is an England national team footballer who became the youngest ever player to score on his senior England debut, aged 18. On 21 March 2025, he scored 20 minutes into the match against Albania at Wembley. Harry Kane, England captain, also scored in the 77th minute, leading to a 2-0 win for England. This game was of particular significance, as it was Thomas Tuchel's first game in charge of the team, as well as a World Cup qualifier.

Men's football is the biggest and most popular sport in England, dominating in both spectator numbers and participation. 40% of the population watch or follow the sport (Harris Interactive, 2019). Therefore, it is not a surprise to see football featured on the front page.

Alton Towers is the UK's largest theme park. It typically closes for the off-season between mid-November and mid-March. Anyone over 90cm tall needs a ticket. One-day walk-up tickets can cost up to £68 (correct as of 2026). Merlin Entertainments, the conglomerate that owns the attraction, operates a dynamic pricing system, meaning tickets are usually more expensive during busy periods such as sunny bank holidays and cheaper on quieter rainy weekdays.

Giveaways are a typical convention for tabloids. The Sun Superdays is a promotion that provides free or heavily discounted tickets to major UK attractions, such as Alton Towers, Thorpe Park and Chessington World of Adventures. Access usually requires collecting a set number of Sun Savers codes printed in the newspaper. Therefore, *The Sun* can be seen to be incentivising their C2DE audience to buy the paper repeatedly in order to benefit.

Part 2: Starting points – Media language

Consider how choice of elements of media language portrays aspects of reality and conveys messages and values:

The headline 'Faulty Powers' uses a pun, intertextually referencing the popular 1970s sitcom Fawlty Towers and implying the ineptitude of the national grid and more subtly the Labour government's underfunding of 'Britain's...infrastructure'. The 'Y' and the 'S' of the headline have been designed to appear wonky, further emphasising the chaotic nature of the event. This is also a reference to the wonky lettering on the Fawlty Towers sign outside the hotel, which was regularly misspelled in a popular recurring gag on the programme.

The bullet point sub-headings which sit above the main image serve as a summary, allowing the audience to gain a quick snapshot of the story. They also function as enigma codes, drawing readers in by encouraging them to discover how the fire started, how Britain has been 'humiliated' and why the 'back up failed'. Of course, these questions can only be answered if the audience chooses to buy or read the newspaper.

The opening to the article can be seen on the right-hand third of the cover, beginning with a byline. This suggests that the newspaper is delivering 'hard news' and adds weight to the story. Emotive language, typical of tabloid newspapers, is used throughout the body copy, including words such as 'shambolic', 'disaster', 'fiasco' and 'mayhem', to convey outrage at the situation. Content that provokes outrage has been shown to increase audience engagement and is more likely to be shared both in person and online. The use of colloquial language, such as 'blaze' and 'knocked out', is also conventional for tabloids and suits the paper's approximate reading age of eight.

The decision to devote the majority of the front cover to the dramatic nighttime image of the fire at the Hayes electrical substation illustrates the impact *The Sun* wants this story to have on its audience. The tightly cropped image emphasises the scale of the fire, while the reds, oranges and yellows connote danger and destruction. Meanwhile the cropped image of the information board stating 'Heathrow Closed' adds a sense of proximity and veracity to *The Sun's* report, suggesting that reporters and photographers were on the scene covering the breaking news as it unfolded.

Consider codes and conventions and how media language communicates meanings:

The masthead uses bold block lettering in red and white. Other UK newspapers, such as *The Mirror*, *The Sunday People* and *The Daily Star*, also use this style and are commonly referred to as 'red tops' because they specialise in tabloid journalism – a form of journalism often associated with sensationalism, celebrities and gossip. Tabloids are known for simplifying complex issues for mass audiences.

The image of Kym Marsh is anchored by the headline 'Kym and the Fab at 50 Club'. The image carries connotations of glamour and red-carpet culture, suggesting celebration and celebrity status. *The Sun's* 35–64-year-old audience may recognise the red, floor-length, strapless gown as an intertextual reference to Jessica Rabbit from the film *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*, reinforcing the 'screen siren' aesthetic associated with celebrity glamour. This 'soft news' off-lead provides a contrast to the main story and broadens the newspaper's audience appeal.

The small photoshopped image of England footballers Myles Lewis-Skelley and Harry Kane shows them celebrating their goals against Albania. Their success is anchored by the text 'England 2 Albania 0'. The pun 'Myles Better' plays on the word 'miles', implying that the



England team improved significantly in this game thanks to the young footballer. Sport is a key interest for *The Sun's* readership, and many of its front pages emphasise national sporting success. Combined with the timeliness and prominence of the story, this acts as another incentive for audiences to purchase the print edition.

The Alton Towers offer of 'Get 2 Tickets' positioned in the masthead uses the official Alton Towers logo, suggesting synergy between the two brands for mutual benefit. Alton Towers receives national promotion heralding the start of a new season, while *The Sun* gets to offer an incentive for audiences to buy the print newspaper, as opposed to reading the content online for free. The flags and the stars within the Alton Towers logo connote celebration, magic and excitement, suggesting to the audience what they will experience if they go to the theme park. By using the written codes 'on us', *The Sun* positions itself as generous and audience-friendly in order to encourage loyalty and positive associations with the brand.

Possible areas for further investigation:

Codes and conventions of newspaper covers: layout, strapline, house style, price, digital convergence. Emotive vs formal language to engage different audience responses.

Part 3: Starting points – Representation

Consider the representation of gender:

Gender is represented stereotypically on the front page of *The Sun*, with traditional gender norms being conformed to. Women, represented through Kym Marsh, are constructed as feminine and glamorous. While glamour can be associated with self-confidence and success, the choice of a very specific archive image reinforces the idea that women are passive objects of visual pleasure – commodities used to sell newspapers. The plunging sweetheart neckline of the red dress could be interpreted as an intertextual reference to the cultural sex symbol Jessica Rabbit, reinforcing patriarchal structures in society.

These patriarchal structures can be seen in the representation of men too, through the two footballers. Men are constructed as dynamic, successful and strong, reinforcing traditional stereotypes of masculinity. These may also have been chosen to appeal to the dominant demographic of *The Sun* readership.

Both men and women are presented as stars, whose names the audience should know. This is clear through the use of a mononym for Kym and the use of a pun for Myles. Celebrity imagery is conventional within tabloid newspapers and helps drive sales, while also providing lighter, image-driven content that contrasts with the more serious lead story.

Consider the representation of age:

Tabloid newspapers often represent age stereotypically, and representations of age are frequently linked to gender. On this front cover, Kym Marsh is presented as discussing the 'Fab at 50 Club', implying that she is either approaching or has reached the age of 50. On the surface, the representation of a female celebrity positively discussing turning 50 offers a favourable representation of midlife, suggesting that it is an exciting milestone to be embraced and celebrated. This reflects the growing media focus on topics such as the menopause and the rise of female 'midlife influencers'. However, the choice to use an archive image of Kym from when she was approximately 39 years old, without explicitly acknowledging this, could suggest that women who visibly look 50 are considered less desirable or attractive. This reinforces 'ageless beauty' stereotypes that minimise or erase the visible signs of ageing and may contribute to wider societal ageism.



Myles Lewis-Skelley, despite being only 18 years old, is not represented differently to Harry Kane, aged 31. Both are portrayed as energetic, competitive and successful, reflecting sports media's tendency to prioritise athletic performance over age. As a result age differences become flattened, with sports figures of different generations represented primarily through their ability and achievements rather than their stage of life.

Consider the representation of events and issues:

The fire at the substation is represented as a major event with consequences extending far beyond the airport itself. *The Sun* frames the incident in the body copy of the article as a 'global disaster', connoting that it had international repercussions. The event is also constructed as chaotic with the use of emotionally charged language like 'mayhem' and 'fiasco', implying that the situation could have been avoided if better systems and contingency plans had been in place. This use of hyperbole is typical of tabloid journalism.

The Sun firmly positions itself as a revealer of 'truth' by claiming that the fire 'exposed' weaknesses in Britain's infrastructure and resulted in the country being 'humiliated'. The suggestion that the incident damaged Britain's international reputation reflects the newspaper's use of populist rhetoric, framing a complex infrastructure failure as an emotional national drama.

Section B

Part 4 : Starting points – Media industries

Industry context

Newspapers used to be hugely profitable, but the industry as a whole was not prepared for the arrival of the internet in the 1990s. News content was often made available online for free, while publishers failed to take control of advertising, creating opportunities for companies like Google and Facebook. As a result, the newspaper industry has experienced long-term financial decline. Much of the advertising revenue that once supported newspapers is now absorbed by major technology platforms, forcing publishers to make significant cost reductions, including cuts to staffing. Over the past decade, media groups have experimented with a range of strategies to increase revenue, from subscription models (for example *The Times*), membership and donation models (for example *The Guardian*), and diversification combined with advertising-led approaches (for example *The Sun*).

Newspapers are largely self-regulated, with editors expected to follow the Editors' Code of Practice. If readers believe that any content has breached of this code, they can 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 newspaper, while journalists generate ideas, write stories and take photographs. The editor then signs off the final content. Increasingly, however, newsgathering also involves citizen journalism, where members of the public use smartphones to capture events as they happen, providing source material for news organisations.



- **Advertising** – Sales teams sell space both in the newspaper and on the website to brands wishing to promote their products and services.
- **Design** – Page designers lay out the newspaper, 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 in print and online formats.
- **Distribution** – The finished print edition is distributed to newsagents and supermarkets. Digital content is made available through *The Sun* app, while online stories are pushed out through platforms such as Apple News and social media to maximise audience reach.

Areas for further research:

- The newspaper, owner, editor, writers, photographers and 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 generate revenue through advertising and, in this sense, journalism is increasingly treated as a commodity whose purpose is to both profit and influence. In addition to conventional advertisements, which are very obvious in their purpose, *The Sun* also features advertorials – promotional content written in the style of editorial journalism that has been paid for by a brand. Because advertorials resemble genuine editorial content, they can carry greater persuasive power with audiences, appearing to have the endorsement of both the publication and its journalists.

As print circulation figures continue to decline, newspapers face increasing pressure to attract and retain audiences. Advertisers are less likely to invest in publications with falling readerships, making digital advertising revenue increasingly important. As a result, *The Sun* has diversified into additional commercial ventures, including gambling platforms such as Sun Vegas and Sun Bets, in order to generate alternative sources of income.

Consider the impact of technologies, and convergence:

Readers can consume all the content from the print newspaper on the website ([thesun.co.uk](https://www.thesun.co.uk)) for free. Readers can access an ad-free version of the website for £4.99 per month. There is also the option to subscribe to a digital edition of the print newspaper for £6.99 a week. The digital edition of the print newspaper is consumed through *The Sun* app, which is available on iOS and Android devices.

Statistics relating to online reach and readership can be difficult to verify, with many newspapers (including *The Mirror* and *MailOnline*) claiming to have the largest audience. According to a 2021 PAMCo study, *The Sun* online reached approximately 6 million people per day. However, rival publishers argue that the quality of audience engagement is more important than overall reach, emphasising the amount of time readers spend engaging with content. *MailOnline*, for example, claimed 5.4 billion minutes of reader engagement per month across print and digital platforms, compared to only 3.1 billion minutes for *The Sun*.



To expand its engagement beyond its target audience, *The Sun* supplies free content to Apple News. Click-through traffic from the UK's most popular news app reportedly generates 23% of *The Sun's* page views. Readers can follow *The Sun* on social media platforms too, including Facebook, X, TikTok, Snapchat and Instagram. Each platform offers different content to different audiences.

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

Part 5: Starting points – Audiences

Consider target audiences:

The Sun, both online and in print, targets lower to middle income social groups, with its largest audience share coming from the C2DE demographic. Although the split is close, the majority of both print and online readers are male. Most print readers are aged between 45 and 64, whereas around 60% of online readers are below the age of 34.

According to ascento.co.uk, the average reading age of the UK population is nine years old. *The Sun* has a reading age of around eight years. The use of bold text, strong visuals and short sections of copy helps make the newspaper accessible to a wide audience, particularly readers who may prefer straightforward, easy-to-read content. This style of formatting also allows readers to skim and scan articles quickly, making it suitable for reading during busy routines such as commuting.

Promotions such as Sun Hols, where readers collect tokens, appeals to lower-income demographics, while also building loyalty between the brand and the reader.

Consider theoretical perspectives:

Active/passive audience: Historically, readers of print newspapers were often considered passive (in other words, 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 Sun brands to exemplify the different appeals to audiences.

Acknowledgements

[Facts and figures](#) from Hurst Media Company (2020) *The Sun - Profile*

[Facts and figures](#) from YouGov (2026) *The Sun*

[Information](#) from Langford, L. (2019) Harris Interactive, *Sports Participation, Viewing & Fandom in the UK*