

The Times – American Election (2016)



Credit: The Times, Thursday November 10, 2016

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Component 1 Media Products, Industries and Audiences – Newspapers

Focus Areas:
Media language
Representation
Media industries
Audiences
Media contexts

Product Context

- *The Times* newspaper is a British national ‘quality’ newspaper first published in 1785. The Times has been published by Times Newspapers since 1981 a subsidiary of News UK, wholly owned by News Corp, Rupert Murdoch’s company.
- This edition was published on the 10th November 2016 following the unprecedented high profile American election campaign which was eventually won by Republican Donald Trump, a 70 year old billionaire famous for appearing on reality TV show *The Apprentice*.
- *The Times* is famous for having a range of journalists with varied political viewpoints which allows the newspaper to offer a more neutral political stance on Trump’s victory.

SECTION A – ANALYSING MEDIA LANGUAGE AND REPRESENTATION

STARTING POINTS – Media Language

Cultural Context

Donald Trump achieved one of the most improbable political victories in modern US history, despite a series of controversies exposed during the election campaign, his extreme



policies that drew criticism from both sides of the political spectrum, a record of racist and sexist behaviour, and a lack of political experience.

The **contemporary audience** can be assumed to be familiar with the **codes and conventions** of newspaper front pages and the **mode of address** that these newspapers present to their readers.

The Times chose to use an **image** across both the **front and back pages** of Trump celebrating his victory against a backdrop of the American flag. This use of **American iconography** establishes the **cultural context** of the story and **connotes patriotism**. Trump and Mike Pence, the Vice President, are positioned in a **medium close up shot** on either side of the frame with Trump in the foreground. **Codes of dress** connote a business approach with both men dressed in black suits but wearing red and blue ties which again reflect American iconography. The **body language** of the two men demonstrates an **emotive response** with Pence applauding Trump and the president clenching his right fist in celebration. The **copy** on the front cover is in white like the masthead and simply states ‘The New World: Donald Trump sends shockwaves around the Globe’. This statement is powerful but maintains a **neutral approach** which encourages readers to establish their **own viewpoint**. The use of a quote by Trump on the back page again suggests a neutral stance but could be interpreted as offering readers an insight into Trump’s character and need for acceptance.

Theoretical perspectives:

Semiotics – Roland Barthes

The use of American iconography throughout the front and back pages and the use of the American flag as a backdrop will have immediate **cultural significance** for the reader who will be able to **create meaning** in the **associations** they have with these signs.

Structuralism - Levi-Strauss

The use of the **headline** ‘The New World’ positioned over Trump’s jacket **invites readers** to **question** what the impact of Trump’s presidency may be, which is **reiterated** through the use of the **subheading** ‘Donald Trump sends shockwaves around the Globe’. His **body language** suggests determination and jubilation.

STARTING POINTS – Representation

Both Trump and Pence represent the **stereotypical, white, middle class, male** politician and their strong Christian, **conservative values** were used throughout the election campaign to encourage the American public to vote Republican.

Consider how representations are constructed through a process of selection and combination.

Both Trump and Pence are dressed in tailored business suits which **represent** them as **business like and conservative** in their appearance. They are both wearing American flag badges on their lapels which is **symbolic of their patriotism** and commitment to their cause. The use of coloured ties (blue and red) is **symbolic of the American flag** and draws attention to the men. Their **body language and facial expression** **connote** determination and a serious approach.

Theoretical perspectives:

Representation – Stuart Hall

The **representation** of Trump and his Vice President are constructed, using media language to **create meaning for the audience**. The use of these ‘**signs**’ by the newspaper suggest that Trump and his team belong to a **specific cultural group** of predominantly white, middle class

men. This use of representation transmits ideas to the reader about **inequalities of power and the subordination of certain social groups**.

SECTION B: UNDERSTANDING MEDIA INDUSTRIES AND AUDIENCES

Starting Points – Industry

The Times was first **published** in 1785 and is part of the **Times newspaper group** which is a **subsidiary of News UK**.

News UK is a British-based, American-owned newspaper publisher, and a subsidiary of the **American mass media conglomerate News Corp**. **News Corp** is a newly formed company, which concentrates on newspapers and publishing. The company formed following a split from News Corporation, a **powerful conglomerate** with interests in film and broadcasting in addition to newspapers and publishing.

The company also produces *The Sun* newspaper and previously the *News of the World*, which ceased production following the **phone hacking scandal of 2011**.

The company has demonstrated a predominantly **right wing political allegiance** with The Sun newspaper backing the **conservative government** in recent elections. However, *The Times* has maintained a more **neutral stance**.

The group was one of the first companies in the UK to introduce **an online newspaper** but also **paywalls** which required readers to pay for use of the site. This was introduced in response to the fall in print sales within the group. However, **The Times** is the only national quality newspaper to show year-on-year growth for print sales (407, 566 daily average).

The Times is part of the **Independent Press Standards Organisation (Ips0)** - an independent body which is not backed by the Government and is fully funded by industry itself. This is a **regulatory body** that maintains press standards but is anti-Leveson in its approach.

Theoretical approaches:

Power and Media industries – Curran and Seaton

As *The Times* is part of both a horizontally and **vertically integrated company** and subsequently

a **large conglomerate**, being part of a huge press organisation could limit or **inhibit creativity and journalists' freedom**. Rupert Murdoch is often accused of **controlling his newspaper content and editorial teams** which would support this point. However, it could also be suggested that by having a more **diverse pattern of ownership**, a **more pluralistic approach** could create conditions for more varied and adventurous media productions.

Regulation – Sonia Livingstone and Peter Lunt

The Times Newspaper Group and News Corp are facing **increasing pressure** alongside the rest of the UK press industry to **adhere to strict rules and guidelines** on industry practice. This has arisen after the **phone hacking scandal** (which involved one of their own newspapers) and subsequent Leveson enquiry into the industry. There is an **underlying issue** of **protecting citizens from harmful material while ensuring choice and press freedom**. The increasing power of companies like News Corp and their **expansion into digital media** has also placed traditional approaches to media at risk.

Cultural Industries – David Hesmondhalgh

The Times Newspaper group is part of a both **vertically and horizontal integrated** company with a wide range of titles on offer in order to **maximise audiences and minimise risks**. Rather than seeing digital media as a threat the company has **embraced its digital expansion** and introduced paywalls to allow for **online content** to be viewed while still generating income. As part of **News Corp**, the company finds itself part of a wide organisation responsible for different cultural industries. This can benefit the newspaper greatly in terms of production and promotion.

STARTING POINTS: Audience

How are audiences grouped and categorised?

The Times' **target audience**, according to NRS and ABC data is predominantly ABC1, over 35 and has a liberal/right wing political stance.

How audiences interpret the media product.

The Trump election win edition will target this group as it takes a **fairly neutral approach** which will allow readers to construct their own opinion

and **negotiate their own response** to the election outcome. The subtle signifiers used in the front and back cover offer the reader opportunities to determine their individual reading of the text.

How different audience interpretations reflect social, cultural and historical circumstances.

The use of the headline ‘A New World’ could be an intertextual reference to Aldous Huxley’s book ‘Brave New World’ which parodied the **utopian books** of Wells and other writers. In the book he presents a **frightening vision of the future**, which is dominated by **corporate tyranny and behavioural conditioning**. This reflects many of the concerns that **global audiences** had about the election and the possibility of Trump succeeding in his election campaign.

Theoretical Approaches:

Cultivation Theory – Gerbner

Exposure to **repeated patterns of representation** (of Trump and his election campaign) by newspapers can shape and influence audience’s views and opinions.

Reception Theory - Stuart Hall

The Times is able to promote a **negotiated reading (for the reader)** of its viewpoint on Trump’s victory through the use of encoding and decoding, which is interpreted by the reader.

End of Audience – Clay Shirky

The conceptualisation of audience members as **passive consumers** is no longer tenable in the age of the internet with the rise of the **prosumer** who can create their own content such as submitting stories and being part of forums.