The Guardian
(18 January 2022)

Image from The Guardian / twitter.com

GCSE Component 1: Exploring the Media

Focus areas:
Media language
Representation
Media contexts

THE PRODUCT

- *The Guardian* is a British national daily newspaper with an average daily print circulation of approximately 105,000 in the UK, comprising 53,902 newsstand sales and 51,232 subscriptions (July 2021). Since August 2021, circulation numbers are no longer publicly available.

- *The Guardian* newspaper targets a well-educated, affluent, digitally-savvy, liberal audience. The demographic is 86% ABC1. 54% of *The Guardian* readers are male, and the average age of the print reader is 54. Originally, *The Guardian*'s format was broadsheet, but for cost reasons and changing consumer needs it is now printed in tabloid format.

PART 1: STARTING POINTS – Media language

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

- The dominant image is a long shot of Boris Johnson jogging with his dog. Dressed in a beanie hat, woollen jumper, shorts, and trainers – it is not a statesmanlike image of the Prime Minister.

- The photograph is anchored with the caption explaining what the prime minister is doing, the name of his dog "Dilyn", and where he was in the photograph, "St James's Park". The fact that he looks so unsportsmanlike implies Johnson's ineptitude. The fish shorts and the black leather effect trainers are not what we would expect to see a jogger wearing, let alone the Prime Minister, and the whole effect is quite clownish. This would align with the left-wing,

anti-Johnson beliefs of *The Guardian*'s target audience.

- The main headline "Cummings accuses PM of lying over No. 10 Party", is short, sharp and to the point. The drama of the terms "accuses" and "lying" points to a political spat between Johnson and his former employee Cummings. The fact that it is the Prime Minister who is the subject of this accusation is significant, as they are meant to uphold the highest values in our society, follow the ministerial code, and crucially abide by the rules they pass in parliament.

- The word "party" serves to reinforce Johnson's clownlike appearance in the image and thematically ties in with the skyline feature about the majority of the readers "miss[ing]" parties, implying the public have been following the rules.

- The theme of Conservative dishonesty continues in the headline "Inquiry launched into Mone over 'VIP Lane' deal", which highlights an investigation into a Conservative peer, who may not have been following The House of Lord's code of conduct. Overall, this constructs a reality of the Conservatives as dishonourable, in-line with the left-wing values of the paper.

- The coverline – "What we miss about working in the office" – refers to the work from home culture that has emerged since the start of the pandemic. The paper creates a collective identity for the audience with the pronoun "we" and suggests that *The Guardian* sees the majority of their readership as office workers.

Codes and conventions of media language:

- The headlines across the front page are focused, factual, and unemotional, which is what we would expect from a broadsheet newspaper.

- The skyline is given over to the *G2* supplement, a regular segment in the paper, which when displayed on newsstands may well be the section people see first. This supplement offers a lighter alternative to the hard-hitting news stories of the rest of the newspaper. Investigating the intertextuality of the office pictures and choice of artist for the wine feature reveals more useful

insights on the target audience and how *The Guardian* appeals to their interests and lifestyle.

Possible areas for further investigation:

- **Code and conventions** of newspapers – price, layout, use of cover photographs/ images, house style, bylines.

- **Narrative** – headlines used to tease people to want to read certain stories (could be linked to Roland Barthes' enigma codes).

PART 2: STARTING POINTS – Contexts and representations

Social & Political contexts:

- From 2019-2020, Dominic Cummings served as Prime Minister Boris Johnson's Chief Political Advisor. Forced out of Downing Street at the end of 2020 after an internal power struggle, Cummings publishes a blog, in which he reveals events and activities that took place during his time at No.10 Downing Street.

- The COVID-19 pandemic is a global pandemic. The disease was first identified in December 2019, before the pandemic was declared in March 2020. As of April 2022, it has caused approx. 6 million deaths globally.

- To help prevent the spread of the disease, the UK went into 'lockdown', where legal measures were put into place to prevent social mixing. At the time of the "bring your own booze" party, this included the banning of indoor gatherings of more than two people from different households, and those found breaking this law could be fined.

- At the start of lockdown, many offices and institutions closed and workers were advised to work from home. In January 2022, although some have returned to offices and workplaces, this is often with reduced numbers and working from home continues for many. Preventative measures in hospitals and healthcare settings include the use of PPE – Personal Protective Equipment – such as masks, visors, gloves, and gowns.

- Ukraine borders Russia and is a post-Soviet democratic republic. The 2019 presidential elections saw the pro-western leader Volodymyr Zelensky come to power; historically, Ukrainian leaders had been pro-Russia. Tensions had long existed in the region, but in December 2021, Russia increased its troop numbers at the Ukrainian Russian border. This move by Russia's President, Vladimir Putin, generated fears of an invasion and Ukraine requested international support.

- *The Guardian* is described as having mainstream left political values. It does not have an affiliation with any political party but does lean towards the left and has a very liberal tradition. It is therefore not surprising that the main photo is unflattering of the right-wing prime minister.

- *The Guardian* is not owned by a group of shareholders like most other newspapers, for whom making a profit is imperative. Therefore, they believe that they can hold true to their core journalistic principles.

Consider the representation of politicians:

- The front cover is carefully constructed to grab the attention of a typical *Guardian* readership. The political stories have been chosen and laid out in such a way as to appeal to the typical readership.

- Though it doesn't explicitly state an opinion in the style of tabloids (e.g. '*The Sun* Says…'), the choice of these main cover stories portrays the Conservatives as amoral and untrustworthy.

- In both the main photograph and two articles, the Conservatives in question (Johnson and Mone) are portrayed as dishonest.

- The main image in particular shows a politician with none of the typical trappings of a prime minister (formal clothing, statesmanlike environment, composure, and confidence) and as a result, it speaks to a lack of authority and questionable capabilities to hold the office of prime minister.

- The decision to use more inclusive language in the Ukraine story, for example "UK", is suggestive of an article and an issue that the editorial team at *The Guardian* supports and

expects its readers to support. Omitting any mention of the Conservative government or defence secretary, who will have had to make that decision, is indicative of the newspaper's political leanings.

Consider the functions and uses of stereotypes:

- In order to communicate the feature quickly, the images of office workers in the skyline display a range of workplace stereotypes for both individuals and events, e.g. the office romance, the geek, the joker. Whilst tabloids use stereotypes frequently in their lead stories, broadsheets tend to reserve their use for entertainment features.

Possible areas for further investigation:

- Theoretical perspectives (e.g. Stuart Hall) – representation, stereotype, selection/omission.

- It would be helpful to compare this cover with another from the tabloid right-wing press, such as *The Sun*, to see the methods used to represent politicians and office workers.