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## **2. Introduction**

## **2. Introduction**

“Muslims (British and otherwise) have been subject to a high level of suspicion, inequity and outright discrimination for a considerable period of time – practices that have increased since 11<sup>th</sup> September 2001. A great number of publications have illustrated that the news media continue to be culpable for the creation and maintenance of racist sentiment and social practices, and for the maintenance of anti-Muslim racisms specifically.”

(Richardson 2006: 104)

Throughout the latter part of the twentieth century, much of the global Muslim community became distanced from its Western counterparts. The shortcomings of questionable foreign policy and the hypocrisy of selective western intervention in the middle-east led to an intense resentment of the corporate West in large sections of the Arab world. Many attributed this bad feeling to widespread poverty in the region, coupled with a fear of modernity which helped compound instability in an already volatile political climate (Taylor 2006). The ultimate culmination of this hatred was, of course, the 9/11 terrorist attacks on New York, which were swiftly followed by similar events in London and Madrid.

The attacks on the United States became one of the most mediated events in history. In their targeting of The World Trade Centre – an icon of cultural and economic prosperity in the developed West – they shook the very foundations of the civilized world. Horrific images of death, destruction and suffering were broadcast throughout the globe, and the reality of Islamic fundamentalism was finally brought to the world’s attention (Zelizer & Allan 2002: 5). A natural consequence of news media coverage in the aftermath of events was that it brought Muslims, and an awareness of issues regarding their religion, to the fore in Western societies.

Perceptions of the faith within the UK became inherently negative in light of the attacks (Azim 2006: 2), most notably within the less-educated working classes, hungry for celebrity-obsessed tabloid publications and largely oblivious to global politics. Racism, xenophobia and anti-Semitism are still widespread in Britain, perpetuating discrimination and disadvantage for the groups whom these (racist) discourses “position as inferior and subordinate” (Richardson 2004: 4). One could be forgiven for thinking that popular news media in Britain would attempt to identify and diffuse racial tensions within our increasingly diverse and cosmopolitan society. Yet work from academics such as Poole (2002), Richardson (2006) and van Dijk (1991) would suggest that this is not necessarily the case.

As stated by Denzin and Lincoln (2003: 22), the West’s self-proclaimed ‘war on terror’ has developed into a struggle “for hearts and minds”. This struggle is consistently hampered by popular media, pandering to audience prejudice and (mis)representing the war on terror as a crusade against Islam. The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, together with the denial of any real distinction between the terror of Al’Qaeda and the violence of Palestinians and Kashmiris (Shikaki 2002: 1), has convinced many people that the war against terror is being used as an instrument to fight Muslims. The media, it would appear, have done little to dispel the belief that Islam itself is evil, and thus represents the culprit and the enemy (Shikaki 2002: 1). Negative sentiments towards the Muslim faith may be seen to stem from a lack of comprehension; the Muslim face we see in the tabloids is frequently that of the radical – the preaching fundamentalist or suicide bomber. In reality, the vast majority of the Islamic world is peace-loving and deserves to be completely dissociated from the horrendous events of 9/11, yet ongoing racial tension

in Britain goes some way to proving that this has not been possible. When we consider, for example, that following the 7/7 bombings in 2005, recorded hate crimes in the UK rose to a staggering 429 incidents (an increase of 600%), the overwhelming majority of which were directed towards Muslims (Hassan 2007), the tensions created by perceived associations between Islam and fanaticism become all the more apparent. This forces one to question the extent to which publications such as The Sun maintain negative intercultural perceptions through misinformation and misrepresentation, particularly when we acknowledge that such organisations are privately owned and must therefore strike a balance between economic success and honest, impartial reportage, whilst all the time satisfying the requirements of their owners.

Reyes (2005: 1) identifies a British tabloid culture in which even moderate Muslims represent extremists in disguise. Following The Sun's scathing front-page attack against internationally respected progressive scholar Tariq Ramadan (which claimed his methods were more dangerous than extremist cleric Abu Hamza, as they presented an acceptable, reasonable face of terror to impressionable young Muslims), Reyes warned that "at a time when Britain's Muslims are facing increasing numbers of racist attacks, The Sun reads like an incitement to violence" (Reyes 2005: 2). Whether or not this particular story represented an attempt to fuel supposed Islamophobia, it is indicative of an industry quite happy to antagonize sensitive issues in pursuit of commercial success. In a society desperately attempting to integrate and overcome an obvious clash of civilizations, the tabloid media's contributions frequently demonstrate an ignorance of the moral obligations of newspaper reportage. Put simply, the demonisation of Muslims – depicted as radical terrorists rather than peace-loving citizens

– may well sell newspapers to an uneducated, working-class and arguably racist target audience, but it is also likely to have severe consequences for an already marginalized community.

The central objective of this dissertation is therefore to establish the extent to which The Sun newspaper may be responsible for constructing a definition of the Muslim faith as ‘The Other,’ distancing Muslims from indigenous populations and fuelling so-called ‘Islamophobia’. It provides a critical analysis of The Sun newspaper’s output with specific regard to this subject over a one year period, from 17<sup>th</sup> June 2006 to 17<sup>th</sup> June 2007. The research focuses on the events reported during this period, and the sources utilised in their coverage. It also includes a concise survey, carried out to gauge reader’s expectations and understanding of the publications they purchase, as well as their opinions towards the Muslim faith in general.

The research paper is presented in four principle chapters;

- **Literature review:**  
Provides a discursive review of academic research relating to the central issue in order that my investigation can be placed in an appropriate context.
- **Methodology:**  
Details the methods adopted to generate data for analysis.
- **Results and Analysis:**  
Presents discussion and analysis of findings generated by research data, including the extent of adherence to approaches set out in the literature review.
- **Conclusions:**  
Summarises the project’s findings and assesses the strengths and limitations of research techniques adopted.





### **3) Literature Review**

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#### **3.1. Racism in the Media**

“Racism remains one of the most pernicious problems of white society... Research has repeatedly demonstrated that ethnic and racial minority groups always have been, and continue to be, portrayed negatively or stereotypically by the press, for example, as a problem, if not a threat.”

(van Dijk 1991)

Civilized society prides itself on the fact that racism is supposedly a concept of the past. Of course, we are well aware of its continued existence in contemporary Britain, but it is a notion more closely associated with archaic systems of oppression, colonialism and social segregation. Ideally, it is a problem most can appreciate – a problem that can be discussed and progressively eradicated from our everyday lives. Many British people may no longer believe in white social supremacy and may in principle even endorse values of social justice. However, massive legal and scholarly evidence (Runnymede Trust 2002, Khan 2000, Schwartz 2006), as well as the available accounts of the personal experiences of minorities, also show that British people and institutions still engage in the practices that implement the system of sectional dominance, and seldom challenge its underlying beliefs and ideologies.

More than any other form of public communication and discourse, the media has the ability to contribute to the “shared elements that define the ethnic situation and that develop or change the ideological framework used by white people to understand and control ethnic events and relations” (van Dijk 1991: 39). Founded, as it is, on ethical principles, and with truth-telling as its fundamental basis, successful journalism should therefore carry a moral obligation to present both sides of the story, rather than pandering

to ideals imposed by those in powerful positions. All too frequently, however, it is a biased story that is finally delivered to the consumer of popular news media.

### **3.1.1. *Headlines***

“The headline is critical, summarizing and drawing attention to the story. Its telegraphic style is probably the best-known feature of news reporting”  
(Crystal 2003: 382)

Bell highlights the importance of headlines in communicating an immediate message to their audience, describing them as “a part of news rhetoric whose function is to attract the reader” (Bell 1991: 189). Specifically, they have a double purpose: a semantic function, regarding the referential text, and a pragmatic function regarding the receiver to whom the text is addressed. In short, headlines carry the capacity to not only summarise the content of any news story, but captivate a reader and engender emotional responses within that reader that may influence his or her interpretation of events.

Van Dijk found that headlines relating to ethnic affairs provide textual definition which is “seldom positive, occasionally neutral and often negative.” He goes on to state that “the lexical style of these headlines is accordingly dramatic and aggressive” (van Dijk 1991: 69). Tabloid headlines in particular, are often criticised for emphasising and consolidating racial ideologies. For example, Richardson’s 2005 study hypothesised that positive words within article-leading texts would be used more frequently to describe ‘our’ actions, and negative words would be used more frequently to describe ‘theirs’. His conclusions state “this was exactly what the sample recorded” (Richardson 2007: 205).

Since newspaper readers use headlines and leads to guide their process of comprehension towards any news report, biased topical structures may “influence the

way the readers interpret the text – and how they interpret the world” (van Dijk 1991: 73). For instance, whilst information regarding the social and cultural background of racial tensions within the impoverished inner cities of Britain is systematically downgraded in the press, the consequent problems caused by immigrants (including violence, terror and their impact upon the labour market) are prominently placed in tabloid headlines. This serves to reinforce the prejudices that frame British Muslims as the ‘other’ and damage ongoing processes of social integration.

### **3.1.2. *Subjects***

The subject about which any newspaper article is written is obviously central to the encoding of racial prejudice in popular news media. It is arguably the most important aspect of news reports and crucial in any analysis of ethnic affairs reporting. It embodies what newsmakers construe to be the most important information about an event and “besides their prominent discursive functions, topics reflect many dimensions of the psychology and sociology of news” (van Dijk 1991: 71). When such topics relate to ethnic minority groups therefore, they may express and reproduce the concerns and the agenda of the prevailing ethnic consensus of the racial majority.

A 1989 study found that right-wing tabloids chose to cover race relations as some kind of ‘race-war,’ as a deep conflict between the British majority and the West Indian or Asian minorities or immigrants. Indeed, during the four month period of investigation, *The Sun* devoted a total of almost 70% of its column space to crime, policing, riots, The

National Front and ‘The Honeyford Affair’ (van Dijk 1991: 80), all of which were closely linked to racial tensions of the period within British society.

In more recent times, many have called into question the tabloid media’s ability to select balanced and representative subject matter when dealing with such issues. Contemporary coverage of Muslims, for example, is generally based around fanaticism, terrorism and the danger foreign peoples may pose to British society:

“The Sun’s reporting highlights the risk that the media will regard British Muslims with caution and suspicion, a sure way to close off the path to mutual understanding”

(Reyes 2005: 4)

Poole (2006) utilises subject analysis as part of her study into the effect of September 11<sup>th</sup> and the war in Iraq on British newspaper coverage. Somewhat worryingly, her findings suggest that the negative representation of the cultural minority (in this instance, Muslims), is consistent with the reproduction of prevailing ethnic ideologies identified earlier in this work:

“The representations of Muslims in the UK are now closer to the undifferentiated global aggressor that theory postulates. The more persistent the framework, the more indicative it is of an essential Muslimness and is in danger of becoming fixed”

(Poole 2006: 102)

Poole’s research helps to qualify her earlier work, suggesting that stories will only be selected for publication if they fit with an agreed idea of who Muslims are. She asserts that coverage of Islam in mainstream media adheres to four central themes:

- 1) That Muslims are a threat to security in the UK due to their involvement in deviant activities.
- 2) That Muslims are a threat to British ‘mainstream’ values and thus provoke integrative concerns.
- 3) That there are inherent cultural differences between Muslims and the host community which create tensions in interpersonal relations.

- 4) That Muslims are increasingly making their presence felt in the public sphere (demonstrated through the topics of politics, education and discrimination).

(Poole 2002: 84)

### 2.1.3. *Sources*

Most research on news stories and of sourcing routines in newspapers is undercut by the assumption that, depending on the focus of research, more sources (including minorities) will create more representative, and hence more balanced, reporting. Richardson's (2005) study suggests otherwise, indicating that young, female, non-white, non-bureaucratic sources are frequently afforded minimal column space or silenced altogether. He found that Muslim sources were overwhelmingly only included and only quoted in reporting contexts critical of their actions and religion, and, "when Muslim activities are not criticised, Muslim sources are, almost without exception, absent from journalistic texts" (Richardson 2006: 115). Such an approach not only consolidates links between Islam and negativity, but distances Muslims from their non-Muslim counterparts (a point that is explored in more detail during *Construction of 'The Other'* section).

The absence of sources from minority group members further confirms the thesis that the media tend to marginalise ethnic minorities. Moletch & Lester (1974) assert that newspapers reflect the practices of those who have the power to determine "the experiences of others", and indeed, it is the dominant authorities, especially the police and politicians, that "constitute the major speakers defining ethnic situation". Research by van Dijk consolidates this viewpoint:

"A closer analysis of the quotation patterns of some major stories showed that in general the selection of speakers is partisan: journalists tend to quote those speakers who voice the position of the newspaper."

(van Dijk 1991: 175)

### **3.2. Tabloids**

“It is generally felt that the moral and practical bases of journalism are slipping away. The high standards of yesterday are being undermined by sensationalism, prurience, triviality, malice and plain, simple, credulity”

(Sparks & Tulloch 2000: 1)

Stereotypically characterized by sensationalist subject matter and emotive language, together with an informal, almost conversational tone, ‘red-top’ publications have come to represent the undesirable, low-brow sector of the newspaper industry – a sector that frequently places entertainment above information in its key objectives. Complaints are consistently levelled at the tabloids; indeed, Sampson claims that British democracy now has a real problem that has developed from “the dangerous imbalance between media and parliament, and the media’s ability to confuse news with entertainment, and deny the public ability to understand real problems” (Sampson 1996: 42).

Such complaints are nothing new, as there has always been a confusion between entertainment, polemic and truth. The media did, after all, originally grow out of “gossip and propaganda” (Sampson 1996: 42), dictating that much of the industry still functions in order to please, stimulate and persuade its audiences, rather than simply to educate them. To underestimate the persuasive power and social influence of tabloids however, would be to ignore their fundamental significance to contemporary society. When Taylor writes, “tabloid journalism is the direct application of capitalism to events and ideas. Profit, not ethics is the prevailing motivation” (Taylor 1992: 409), she articulates why such publications are accurate barometers of the contemporary commercialized landscape that Britain is in 2007. Their strength lies in the fact that tabloid editors place less



emphasis on honesty, impartiality and journalistic integrity than their broadsheet counterparts.

In considering tabloid news as a marketable commodity, as opposed to a neutral source of information, critics suggest that popular news runs the risk of becoming what is sometimes describes as ‘newszak’: “a product designed and ‘processed’ for a particular market and delivered in increasingly homogenous ‘snippets’ which make only modest demands on the audience” (Franklin 1997: 4). This supposed commodification of news is criticised by Bourdieu, who claims that,

“the focus is on those things which are apt to arouse curiosity but require no analysis... This feeds a style of reporting capable of mobilising prejudice against those who are already stigmatized”

(Bourdieu 1998: 51)

Conboy suggests that the idealized reader of the contemporary British tabloid displays “all the signifiers of community – vernacular, shared tastes, shared habits of media consumption” (Conboy 2006: 13) and thus popular press can appeal to these tastes without fear of academic reproach. For example, tabloids combine dialect and register in their deployment of a language which draws on social sensitivities about who uses which form of language. In appropriating the idiom of the ‘ordinary’ people of the country – the non-elite – the tabloids have managed to “produce a marketable combination of social class and language” (Conboy 2006: 11). Put simply, through the utilisation of informal, colloquial language, together with visually appealing graphology and easily digestible text, the tabloids are able to form an alliance with their readers which may be used to promote divisional ideals.

Franklin attacks the academic credibility of tabloid newspapers, proposing that a shift in editorial priorities has radically altered the function of the popular press:

“Entertainment has superseded the provision of information; human interest has supplanted the public interest; measured judgment has succumbed to sensationalism; the trivial has triumphed over the weighty”

(Franklin 1997: 4)

Nevertheless, they do have a frighteningly powerful influence over public opinion, not least in shaping racial perceptions. McGuigan attacks *The Sun* as merely being machine of popular consensus:

“The Sun is, arguably, symptomatic of and contributory to a political culture in which popular pleasure is routinely articulated through oppressive ideologies that operate in fertile chauvinistic ground. It is populist in the worst possible sense.”

(McGuigan 1993: 184)

The stability of the indigenous community (in this instance, British), is maintained by not only expressing the solidarity and racial identity of original community members, but also by a “consistent patterning within the representation of outsiders of the community” (Conboy 2006: 94). The idealistic ‘other,’ whether based on social, racial or geographic parameters, is marginalised so as to unify the core readership, and by highlighting the threats posed by terrorists, asylum seekers and fanatics, the external challenges supposedly created by outsiders reinforce a sense of national community. Such techniques are readily utilised by *The Sun*, who paint a picture of society under attack, with common headlines of: ‘abuse of free handouts,’ ‘clampdown on asylum cheats,’ ‘benefit tourists,’ ‘milking the system’ (Conboy 2006: 96). In such cases, *The Sun* manages to present itself and its views as moderate while continuing to use language about immigrants which can only be described as inflammatory.

Some argue that marginalisation techniques are particularly prevalent when outsiders have associations with “an aspect of Britain’s imperial past or neo-imperial present, as British culture is rooted in a history which is indelibly marked with the

associations of empire and cultural presumptions of superiority” (Hall 1981: 38). The Sun’s treatment of Muslim cleric Abu Hamza is typical of a tabloid publication ostracising an individual on the grounds of their religious background or radical behaviour. Selected for special treatment as much on account of his extraordinary appearance as for his attempts to radicalise Muslims at a North London Mosque, the publication referred to Hamza as ‘evil hooky,’ ‘evil Hamza’ and ‘mad mullah’ (Conboy 2006: 109). Unsurprisingly, the subsequent attention paid to Abu Hamza and the language used to describe him identified the cleric as a key figure in the personification of Islam as a religion of fanaticism.

### **3.3. Construction of ‘The Other’**

The distinction between ‘Us’ and ‘Them,’ ‘Self’ and ‘Other,’ “fundamental dichotomies of human existence” (Pintak 2006: 190) has come to define global affairs in the aftermath of 9/11 and the framing of Islam as a foreign, unknown faith has actively prevented successful integration of contemporary society and made cooperation between different racial and social communities all the more difficult. Consider, for example, the comments of former Home Secretary David Blunkett in relation to Muslims in Britain following the 2001 Bradford riots: “We could live in a world which is airy-fairy, libertarian, where everyone does precisely what they like and we believe the best of everybody and then they destroy us” (Blunkett in Hillyard 2002: 107). Hillyard asserts that Blunkett’s attitude represented a,

“heavily partitioned and binary division of good and bad... It is a dangerous mindset of ‘them’ and ‘us’, a mindset which has dominated the Home Office since its formation. Far from accepting difference and diversity and an all-inclusive society, it is a society where the enemy is everywhere.”

(Hillyard 2002: 110)

There now exists a fundamental disconnection in communications between the UK and Muslims throughout the world. As Khan suggests, Muslims in the UK are now considered to be “an alien minority, with social and cultural belief values and systems diametrically opposed to those of the West” (Khan 2000: 31). One could be forgiven for believing that differences in culture, faith and social values are likely to dictate that distance will always be maintained between ‘alien’ communities, yet Muslims appear further removed from society than other ethnic minorities in Britain.

Pintak suggests that this distance can be seen to have its roots in three principle sources; namely, individual prejudices, government policy, and press activity, yet arguably its fundamental cause is the premise that “each side sees the world through a very different prism” (Pintak 2006: 188). Despite efforts to the contrary, government and mass media have done little to narrow this cultural division, instead exacerbating the perception gap by presenting a binary sphere in which there exists only ‘us’ and ‘them,’ ‘good’ and ‘evil,’ ‘civilization’ and ‘barbarity’:

“Beginning within hours of the horrific acts of 9/11, the Bush administration framed the struggle against terrorism in absolutist terms that painted the world in black and white and ignored all shades of grey”

(Pintak 2006: 188)

Osama Bin Laden, Taliban forces in Afghanistan, global terror networks, and subsequently the Muslim faith itself, have all come to epitomise that which is foreign, unknown and therefore dangerous. Nacos even describes the ongoing attempts of popular news media to portray the struggle as a “villain versus hero” situation (Nacos

2002: 48), in which the affluent west is, of course, shown to be heroic, and Krugman (2003) bemoans an increasingly polarised western media, who do little to counter the ‘wilful ignorance’ of supposedly civilized society.

In the main, the reporting of Islam is founded upon the structuring of presuppositions, themes and arguments, and dominated by a twin process of “division and rejection” (Martin-Rojo 1995: 52). More specifically, tabloid representations of Islam and Muslims predominantly argue that Muslims are, “separate,’ ‘inferior’ or ‘the enemy’... reinforcing Muslim cultural *difference* as cultural *deviance* and, increasingly it seems, as a cultural *threat*” (Richardson 2004: 232). It is suggested that the placing of negative social value on political, cultural or physical differences, coupled with the ideological representation of the west as ‘civiliser’ (Richardson 2004: 95) consolidate the aforementioned ‘dichotomies of human existence,’ and further distance Muslims from their counterparts throughout the western world.

### **3.4. ‘Islamophobia’ and 9/11**

“In the post-9/11 climate, the links being made between Muslim terrorists, British Muslim suicide bombers, Muslim ‘hate clerics’ and the ‘rioting’ Muslim communities of Bradford, Oldham and Burnley are increasingly becoming seamless and incontrovertible”

(Alexander 2003: 2)

American journalist Stephen Schwartz defines Islamophobia as, “the condemnation of Islam and its history as extremist, denying the existence of a moderate Muslim majority... and inciting war against Islam as a whole” (Schwartz 2006). Since the events of September 2001, attacks on Muslim, Sikh and other Arab and Asian

communities in the UK have increased four-fold in some areas (McGhee 2005: 102). Although Islamophobia as a concept is not exclusively linked to the 9/11 attacks on the USA and the subsequent war with Iraq, such events have certainly exacerbated its intensity. In the immediate aftermath of the attacks on New York and Washington, the culprits were identified as being Muslims; thus, the connection between Islam and terrorism was consolidated as journalists and politicians began to report and comment on the attacks as being Islamic in origin. Indeed, articles in *The Sun* with reference to Muslims were found to increase by a staggering 658% in the twelve-month period following 9/11 (Whitaker 2002: 3). Not only did this period see a dramatic increase in verbal and physical attacks on Muslims living in the UK, but caused a mobilization of British Far Right extremist groups, especially the BNP, the National Front and Combat 18, against Muslim communities, as reported by the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (McGee 2005: 103).

In light of the widespread hostility now present in British society, the word Islamophobia has been introduced by the Muslim community to describe a new social reality:

“Anti-Muslim prejudice has grown considerably and so rapidly in recent years that a new item in the vocabulary is needed so that it can be identified and acted against. In a similar way there was a time in European history when a new word, anti-Semitism, was needed and coined to highlight the growing dangers of anti-Jewish hostility”

(Runnymede Trust 2002: 1)

In the context of this dissertation, the identification of these very real prejudices makes the potential consolidation of such discrimination by popular news media all the more undesirable. Fears that the UK press may “fuel Islamophobia” (BBC 1998) existed even prior to the dawn of modern-day terrorism in 2001, thus the British media’s willingness

to reinforce negative perceptions of the Muslim faith may be seen to consolidate its position as an antagonist of social conflict.

### **3.5. The dangers of a ‘free’ press**

Lloyd (2004: 140) argues that the presence of an unelected media as a central opposition to the state can create a particularly dangerous political climate. With the vast majority of popular British news media operating under private ownership (consider, for example, that Rupert Murdoch owns approximately 35% of the British newspaper market overall (Alden 2005: 15)), the potential for the imposition of individual interests or opinions upon its consumers is considerable. Moreover, when these interests may be enhanced by communicating potentially racist messages and reinforcing existing ideologies, the implications for minority communities become all the more apparent.

Sampson highlights the dangers of relying on unelected legislators to provide balance to political discourse as part of his critiques on British society in the twenty first century. Journalists depict themselves as guardians of the public interest, vigilant against abuses of power, but it is suggested that the ethical legitimacy of the press, and its influence on politics and public opinion, is still very much up for debate.

“Newspaper owners are more feared and respected than other media tycoons, for they can express their own political views, humiliate politicians and pursue personal vendettas...”

(Sampson 2004: 223)

Popular publications therefore have the capacity to promote existing prejudices for financial gain, and as these prejudices are largely in keeping with those of the working-

class, uneducated reader, then this is to be expected. For many however, the only view of politics is that filtered by critical media, and whilst tabloid newspapers may not be completely representative, their power and social significance should not be underestimated.



## **4. Methodology**

#### **4. Methodology**

In order to establish the culpability of The Sun in fuelling so-called ‘Islamophobia’ by constructing and maintaining racial prejudices, the methodology for research was designed to satisfy the following objectives:

- To examine the coverage of Muslims in The Sun newspaper during a twelve month period, paying particular attention to,
  - the issues it chooses to cover
  - the utilisation of Muslim sources in these reports
  - the journalistic tone of these reports
- To gauge the perceptions of Sun readers towards Islam and British Muslims

It was divided into two principle sections. Firstly, an analysis of newspaper articles selected from The Sun newspaper during a one-year period (17<sup>th</sup> June 2006 – 17<sup>th</sup> June 2007), and secondly, a questionnaire-based survey designed to gauge reader expectations and perceptions.

##### **4.1. Section 1: Content Analysis**

As previously mentioned, analyses of articles printed within the chosen publication were conducted in order to establish,

- i) the specific ‘subjects’ reported
- ii) the sources called upon within these reports
- iii) the evaluative ‘tone’ of these reports

With regard to topic coverage, a quantitative method of content analysis based on that utilised by Poole (2006) was adopted. Quantitative content analysis concerns itself with the measurement of frequencies and such measurements are “useful for analysing the attention and thus importance given to particular issues in relation to a certain subject” (Poole 2006: 89), in this case British Muslims. As an investigative process, it can reveal exactly what makes Muslims newsworthy in the eyes of The Sun, and therefore act as a useful cultural indicator.

Articles were collected from the British Library’s electronic newspaper archive, situated in Colindale, London NW9. The central difficulty at this stage was in finding a representative sample, whilst ensuring that the data accumulated remained manageable. Trawling through every word of all 365 copies of the publication, in order to identify each specific reference to the Islamic faith, seemed unrealistic, particularly as this section constituted only part of my research. In light of this, the archive’s keyword search enabled the location of all pieces containing the words *Muslim* or *Islam* within its headline or accompanying strapline. This search took place on 18<sup>th</sup> June 2007, and produced a total of 245 articles written in the preceding twelve months. Although this may well have omitted reports in which the words *Muslim* and *Islam* were only referred to in the main body of text, it contained a representative collection of information, and was thus selected for analysis.

The subject matter of each article was then identified and recorded. The findings of this content analysis has been collated in the ‘results’ section of this dissertation.

The same data sample was used to analyse the publication's presentation of sources. As Cottle (2000: 428) argues, "whose voices predominate, whose vie and contend, and whose are marginalised or rendered silent on any news stage" are questions of deep interest to the study of journalism. Moreover, he suggests that repeated studies in the field have indicated,

"how groups labelled as deviant within the news media can be dehumanised and even demonised, leading to both the depoliticisation and delegitimation of their claims for wide social acceptance or political change"

(Cottle: 2000: 429)

Put simply, who is allowed to speak and who is not; who is allowed to label others and who is not, are fundamental questions to be asked. The inclusion of source analysis within this research paper therefore enables us to further examine the framing of Muslims as a foreign people, alien to society and representing a threat to the cultural beliefs and values that underpin British civilization.

The sources present within each of the 245 articles were recorded and categorized as being either Muslim or non-Muslim. This not only produced figures indicating the relative textual prominence given to each social grouping, but enable further cross-referencing of these results with the findings from the subject analysis.

Through a technique similar to that adopted by Richardson (2006: 110), I also coded the evaluative tone of each piece compiled during the data collection on a five point scale. Paying specific regard to each text's overall stance towards Muslims and the concept of Islam, articles were placed into categories ranging from '*inherently negative*', to '*inherently positive*,' with '*critical*,' '*neutral*' and '*favourable*' in between. Specifically, this variable coded The Sun's, or the journalist's, or the reader's (in the case of opinion letters) overall valuation of Islam or of the Muslims presented. Although this

arguably constitutes a subjective method of analysis, in so far as its implication relies on an interpretive value judgement, it added a further dimension to the study and identified those texts which openly criticised Muslim peoples (and in so doing help to consolidate ideologies and prejudices that may already exist).

#### **4.2. Section 2: Questionnaire**

In order to gauge the perceptions of Sun readers regarding Islam, and measure their awareness of the potential vilification of Muslims, a multiple-choice based questionnaire was conducted with the general public. As I had convenient access to three major English cities (namely, London, Birmingham and Leeds) and in order to ensure a representative sample, surveys were undertaken at all of these locations. Specifically, they were,

**London:** opposite Costcutter convenience store, Eden Street, Kingston-Upon-Thames, KT1 1EP.

*Research date: Thursday 31<sup>st</sup> May 2007  
Monday 4<sup>th</sup> June 2007*

**Birmingham:** outside WH Smith, Birmingham News Street Station, B2 4QA.

*Research date: Wednesday 6<sup>th</sup> June 2007*

**Leeds:** outside Arden News, The Headrow, Leeds LS1.

*Research date: Monday 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2007  
Tuesday 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2007*

The initial intention had been to survey fifty Sun readers, together with fifty readers of either *The Guardian*, *The Times* or *The Telegraph* at each position, on the basis that

responses from broadsheet readers would act as a useful point of comparison and reference for analysis. Unsurprisingly, the process of data collection proved much more difficult than first anticipated, principally due to the fact that most potential contributors were either in too much of a rush or simply unwilling to take part in the survey. Because of this, the target samples were slightly reduced. Nevertheless, the total amount of questionnaires carried out was as follows:

<b>London:</b>	The Sun	-	40 (participants)
	Broadsheet	-	29
<b>Birmingham:</b>	The Sun	-	40
	Broadsheet	-	30
<b>Leeds:</b>	The Sun	-	36
	Broadsheet	-	30

Suitable informants were identified as they exited the aforementioned premises with the required publications. All took part on a purely voluntary basis. Prior to questioning, they were informed of the nature of my research and assured that all results would remain completely anonymous. In order that the survey was both time efficient and easily comprehensible, participants were provided with a pen and questionnaire, which they filled out individually, as conducting such work verbally is likely to have restricted data collection even further.

The questionnaire itself comprised nine questions. Questions 1 and 2 assessed the reading habits and expectations of the consumer:

**1) How often do you read this newspaper?**

- Daily
- 3-5 times per week
- 1-2 times per week
- 1-2 times per month
- Seldom or never

**2) Why do you choose this newspaper?**

- For information
- For entertainment
- Both of the above
- Neither of the above

Questions 3-5 directly addressed the perceptions of the reader towards the proposed marginalisation of Muslims:

**3) Does Britain view Islam and its followers negatively?**

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

**4) Does this newspaper view Islam and its followers negatively?**

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

**5) Do you personally view Muslims negatively?**

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

Questions 6-9 helped gauge the participant's understanding of Muslim issues, as well as their appreciation of information communicated by popular news media:

**6) Who is the 'war on terror' being fought against?**

- Muslims
- Terrorists
- Both of the above
- Neither of the above

**7) Who was responsible for the attacks of 9/11?**

- Al'Qaeda
- Muslims
- Both of the above
- Neither of the above

**8) What is the Islamic holy book is commonly called?**

- The Qur'an
- The Torah
- The Bible
- Unsure
- 

**9) Who is Abu Hamza?**

- A cleric
- A terrorist
- Both of the above
- Neither of the above
- Unsure

An additional option, to 'pass' or abstain, was also offered for each question. An original copy of the questionnaire and official cover letter (courtesy of ICS at Leeds University) are included in the project as appendices.



## **5. Results & Analysis**

## 5.1. Section 1: Content Analysis

### 5.1.1. Subject Analysis

For evaluative purposes, I have constructed categories into which the prominent subjects of news items about British Muslims can be categorised. By focusing on these prominent subjects, the ability to identify prevailing trends with regard to the type of material presented to the public on Islam is enhanced.

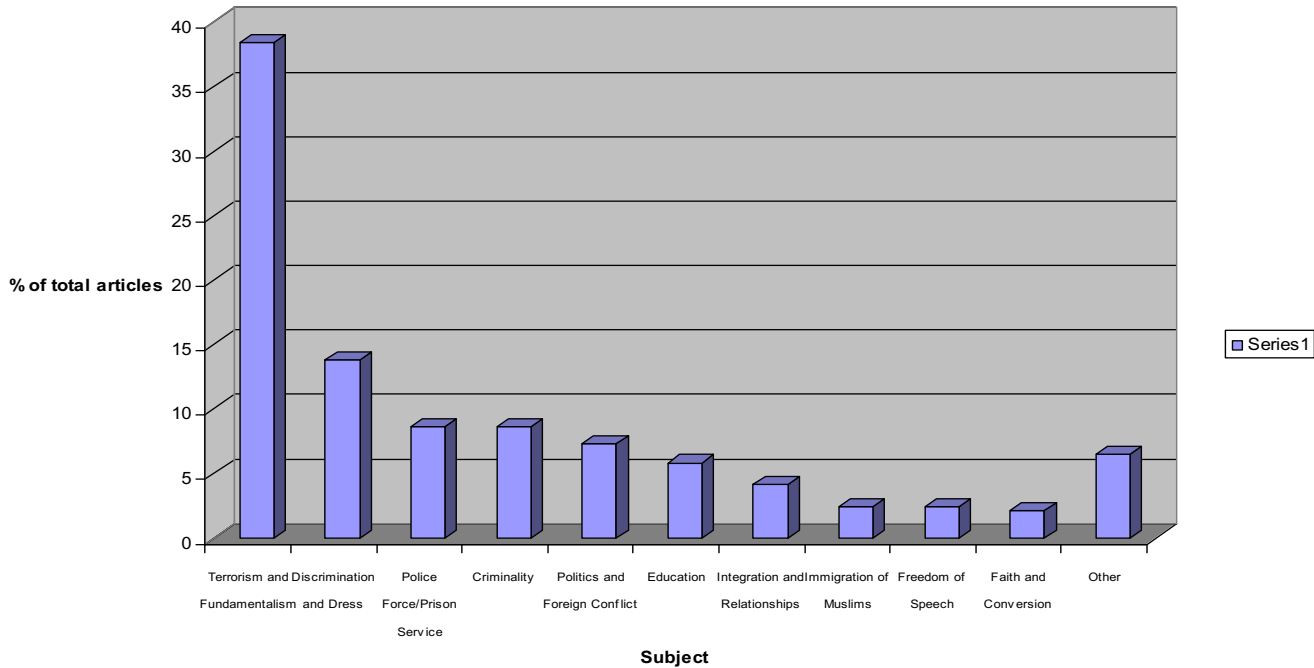
Topical reporting frameworks are selected on the basis of their news value and carried for a given time dictated by their perceived social importance. As Crystal affirms, the chief constraint of news reporting is “the perpetual battle against the pressures of time and space” (Crystal 2003: 380), meaning that some issues are often marginalised or excluded from debate whilst others retain prominence. Increased coverage, therefore, suggests that an issue carries salience to the interests of powerful groups in contemporary society, and specifically, “Islam’s ability to be newsworthy relies on the established notions of who Muslims are and what they represent to (interpretations of) British culture” (Poole 2006: 92).

Quantitative content analysis of the sample data produced the following results:

**Tab 1.0. Principle subjects covered within sample data**

Subject	Articles	Percentage
Terrorism and Fundamentalism	94	38.4
Discrimination and Dress	34	13.8
Police Force/Prison Service	21	8.6
Criminality	21	8.6
Politics and Foreign Conflict	18	7.3
Education	14	5.8
Integration and Relationships	10	4.1
Immigration of Muslims	6	2.4
Freedom of Speech	6	2.4
Faith and Conversion	5	2.1
Other	16	6.5
Total	245	100

Fig 1.0. Principle subjects covered within data sample



These results, together with Fig 1.0, indicate a continuation of the narrow framework of reporting identified by Poole. They demonstrate a restrictive representation of what The Sun considers to be news in relation to Islam. This is exemplified by the fact that 229 of the 245 articles included in the study fell accurately into ten key categories. Admittedly, these categories were relatively broad (for example, ‘Politics and Foreign Conflict’ accounted for articles ranging from a public interest piece on a Muslim MPs to the ongoing crisis in Iraq) but this still demonstrates that The Sun’s approach to what makes Islam newsworthy is somewhat specific. The fact that only sixteen texts could not be appropriately assigned to a category is indicative of a narrow framework, the result of which is the framing of Muslims as a largely homogenous grouping. The publication’s readership is presented with a simplified depiction of Muslims that only incorporates the handful of issues deemed newsworthy, and when compared to the diverse array of topics

tackled in the coverage of indigenous populations, the construction of a 'self' and 'other' mentality becomes apparent.

What is more worrying, however, is the obvious focus of these topics on fundamentalism, criminality and the perceived difficulties of social cohesion. The four most prominent categories, for example, accounted for 170 (69.4%) articles. Nearly 40% of these related to terrorism or fundamentalism of some kind (e.g. 3/11/06 – *'Bomb rap Muslim: I'd Target UK'*, 4/11/06 – *'Muslim wanted new 9-11'*), demonstrating that the association of Islam with extremism has become firmly established since the events of 9/11, with the ongoing threat of terrorist activity in Europe consolidating such links. Indeed, the danger of Islamic extremism on the home front is afforded a significant portion of column space, with the plight of the infamous 7/7 bombers receiving extended coverage from The Sun (e.g. 8/7/06 – *'Blair laid out welcome mat for Muslim Madmen'*, 12/8/06 – *'Lives of Muslim Terror gang'*). The publication feasts on the fact that the physical threat posed by Muslim fanatics no longer exists at a distance, but rather endangers the everyday lives of its readers. Consistent campaigns to uncover covert activities and expose underground political movements only serve to concretise the fear and suspicion expressed towards Muslim peoples, and arguably fuel potential Islamophobia.

A total of 13.8% of the data sample referred to 'discrimination and dress,' (e.g. 7/10/06 - *'Muslim Fury as Straw cranks up row'*) which could be seen as a potential positive. The publication demonstrates a willingness to address the difficulties faced by foreign peoples attempting to integrate themselves into western culture whilst still maintaining their own cultural values. Nevertheless, many of these articles merely re-

iterate Khan's assessment in which Muslims are considered "an alien minority... with systems diametrically opposed to the West" (Khan 2000: 31). In covering the problems encountered by Muslims they are indirectly presented as being completely removed from our society, at times unwilling to cooperate and adapt to British culture (e.g. 16/10/06 – *'Minister: Axe Veil Teacher'*). Moreover, a number of features written on positive discrimination in the workplace bemoan the supposedly democratic systems which allow Muslims to secure employment which would otherwise be reserved for the British working classes. For example, quotas introduced by the police force and prison service, which aim to ensure a representative workforce by favouring racial minorities, is widely criticised within the sample data (e.g. 20/6/06 – *'Muslim Cop Call'*). In this sense, such tensions are undeniably linked to the 'Immigration' category, and indicate The Sun's willingness to sustain van Dijk's proposed ideologies.

The subject of criminality is also prominent, constituting 21 articles (8.6%) within the data. It must be acknowledged that these dealt not only with crime committed by Muslims (e.g. 4/11/06 – *'I was so hungry I stabbed swan: fasting Muslim tells cops'*), but also violence and other criminal activity directed *towards* the Islamic community (e.g. 23/10/2006 – *'Two yobs punch and kick Muslims praying in a mosque in Salford'*). For example, attacks by vandals on London Mosques were given textual prominence. However, in much the same way that Muslims are dealt with from a political perspective, The Sun's stance comes across as uncomfortable - highlighting the problems created, whether directly or indirectly, that reinforce separatist beliefs and label cultural *difference* as cultural *threat* (Richardson 2004: 232). Crime, like politics, has a high news value but

its associations with deviance means that it can easily be linked to different ethnic minority groups in British news coverage (Troyna 1981: 32).

Conversely, more mundane subject matter, which is consequently less likely to depict Muslims in a negative light, is afforded a comparatively small amount of column space. The final five principle categories (namely, Education, Integration and Relationships, Immigration, Freedom of Speech and Faith and Conversion) together represent around 15% of the newspaper's output. Stories about education again focus on the problems generated by Muslims, illustrating what Poole describes as,

“the continuing perception of the importance of education in the transmission of values (and the struggle over what ‘British’ values are) to all groups involved”  
(Poole 2006: 99)

The notions of successful integration and free speech, together with the promotion of Islam as a credible faith, are notable for their absence. Only 21 articles (8.6%) addressed such issues, with an even smaller amount adopting a positive evaluative tone in doing so. This highlights van Dijk's (1991: 73) evaluation that the formation of news topics is highly subjective, and shows the ability of popular news media to marginalise or even silence dissenting voices.

The data presented for analysis supports the assertion that coverage of Islam in mainstream media adheres to Poole's (2006: 84) four central themes (as detailed in *Literature Review*, p12). Through an emotive, sensationalist approach to sensitive issues, The Sun's selection of subject matter frames Muslims as a threat to Britain's stability, emphasising inherent cultural differences and provoking integrative concerns.

5.1.2. Source Analysis

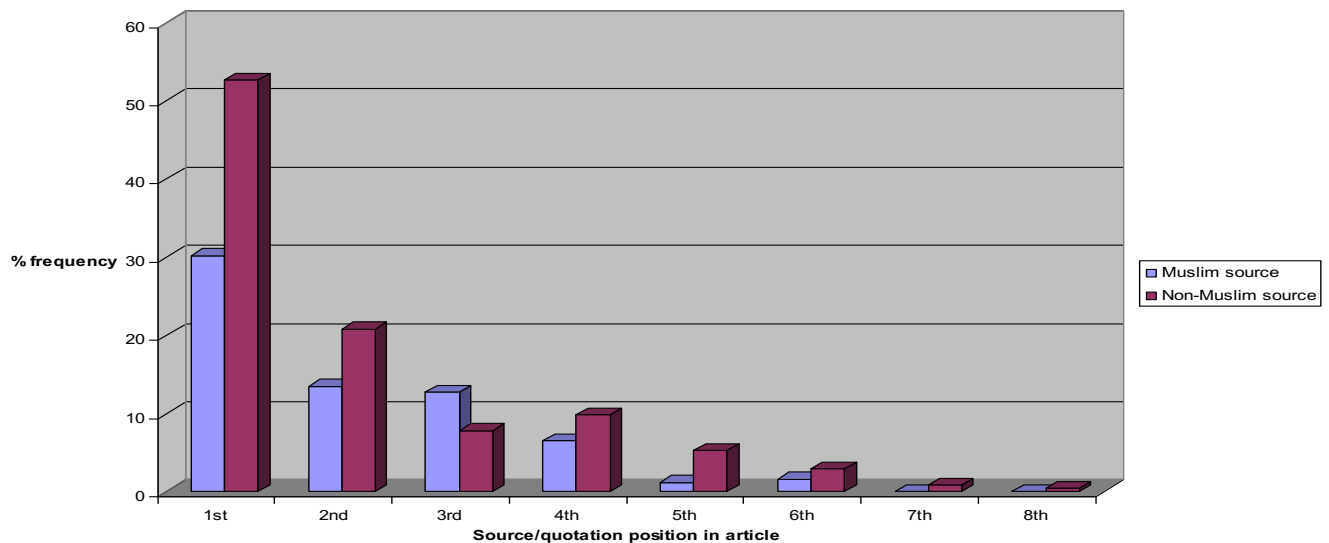
The analysis of sources within the sample data was particularly revealing, in that it demonstrated an obvious preference for ‘western’ voices over their Muslim counterparts. Of the 245 pieces, 203 (83%) called upon an attributable source or quotation. These articles were therefore broken down to incorporate the textual position of each source into analysis (under the premise that the most ‘important’ voices would be acknowledged in a primary position). The results were as follows:

***Tab 2.0. Muslim and non-Muslim sources present within data sample***

	<b>Muslim</b>	<b>% of total articles</b>	<b>Non-Muslim</b>	<b>% of total articles</b>
<b>1<sup>st</sup> source/quotation</b>	74	30.2	129	52.7
<b>2<sup>nd</sup></b>	33	13.5	51	20.8
<b>3<sup>rd</sup></b>	31	12.7	19	7.8
<b>4<sup>th</sup></b>	16	6.5	24	9.8
<b>5<sup>th</sup></b>	3	1.2	13	5.3
<b>6<sup>th</sup></b>	4	1.6	7	2.9
<b>7<sup>th</sup></b>	0	-	2	0.8
<b>8<sup>th</sup></b>	0	-	1	0.4

\* **NB.** A total of 42 (17%) articles did not call upon a source.

**Fig 2. 0. Muslim and non-Muslim sources present within data sample**



One could be forgiven for expecting Muslim sources to dominate stories ultimately written about, and referring to, themselves. Evidently, this is not the case. A total of 154 articles (62.9%) contained a non-Muslim source, whereas only 85 (34.7%) included a clearly attributable Muslim source or quotation. Moreover, 129 (52.7%) utilised a non-Muslim source in primary position – a figure more than 20% higher than the Muslim equivalent of 74 (30.2%). As Fig 2.0 demonstrates, this trend is continued throughout the longer pieces, and although the differentiation is perhaps not quite as noticeable in figures beyond the second source, the prevailing voice remains an educated western one.

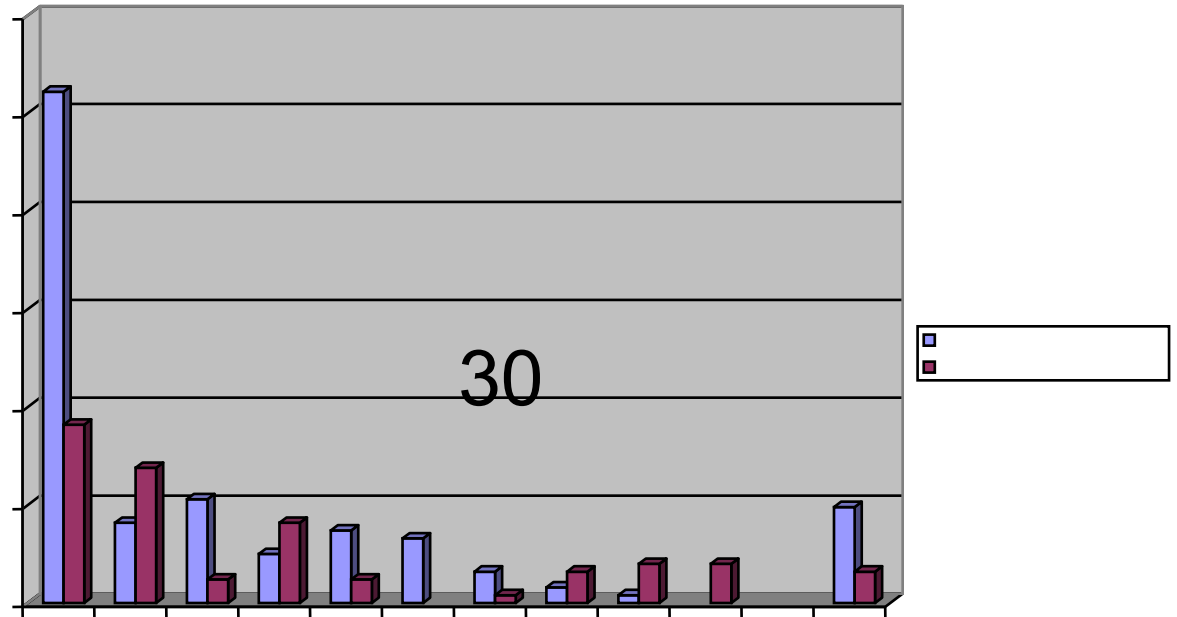
In light of the dangers created by partisan media as highlighted in the literature review of this dissertation, these results indicate the absence of an impartial, balanced and representative approach to news reportage. The lack of contextualisation from Muslim sources further confirms the thesis that The Sun tends to marginalise ethnic minorities, and in so doing, does little to overcome the ‘wilful ignorance’ of wider society.

The cross-referencing of subject and source analysis enables us to understand exactly which topics supposedly merit an Islamic viewpoint:

***Tab 2.1. Primary sources utilised for specific subjects***

<b>Subject</b>	<b>Non-Muslim primary source</b>	<b>% of total articles</b>	<b>Muslim primary source</b>	<b>% of total articles</b>
Terrorism and Fundamentalism	64	26.1	22	9.1
Discrimination and Dress	10	4.1	17	6.9
Police Force/Prison Service	13	5.3	3	1.2
Criminality	6	2.5	10	4.1
Politics and Foreign Conflict	9	3.7	3	1.2
Education	8	3.3	0	-
Integration and Relationships	4	1.6	1	0.4
Immigration of Muslims	2	0.8	4	1.6
Freedom of Speech	1	0.4	5	2.0
Faith and Conversion	0	-	5	2.0
Other	12	4.9	4	1.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>129</b>	<b>52.7</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>30.2</b>





25

Unsurprisingly, non-Muslim sources are utilised across the whole range of subject matter, with only articles related to faith and conversion not placing any western viewpoints in primary position. Their presence is consistent throughout the sample data, and is particularly noticeable when commenting upon extremist activity.

Muslims operating as a primary source presents a more unpredictable trend, yet the results are interesting as they contradict Richardson's initial hypothesis that such sources are overwhelmingly only included in reporting contexts critical of their actions and religion. Admittedly, a larger proportion of texts reporting criminal behaviour call upon Muslim sources, but voices discussing faith, conversion and free speech are generally Muslim in origin. In addition to this, non-Muslim primary sources (26.1%)

20

**% Frequency 15**

outnumbered Muslim ones (9.1%) by a ratio of nearly three to one when specifically addressing the issues of terrorism and fundamentalism – a figure far greater than that identified across all subjects (52.7% vs. 30.2%, *see tab 2*).

### **5.1.3. Evaluative Tone Analysis**

In reporting about ethnic affairs, style and tone play an important function. This is because they enable the subtle communication of underlying opinions and prejudices by stylistic means, allowing values and ideals to be transmitted through a variety of lexical, syntactic and semantic selections. My initial fear was that such selections would be particularly hard to identify, in so far as locating them would require a sophisticated level of analysis beyond the basic means set out in this sub-section of research.

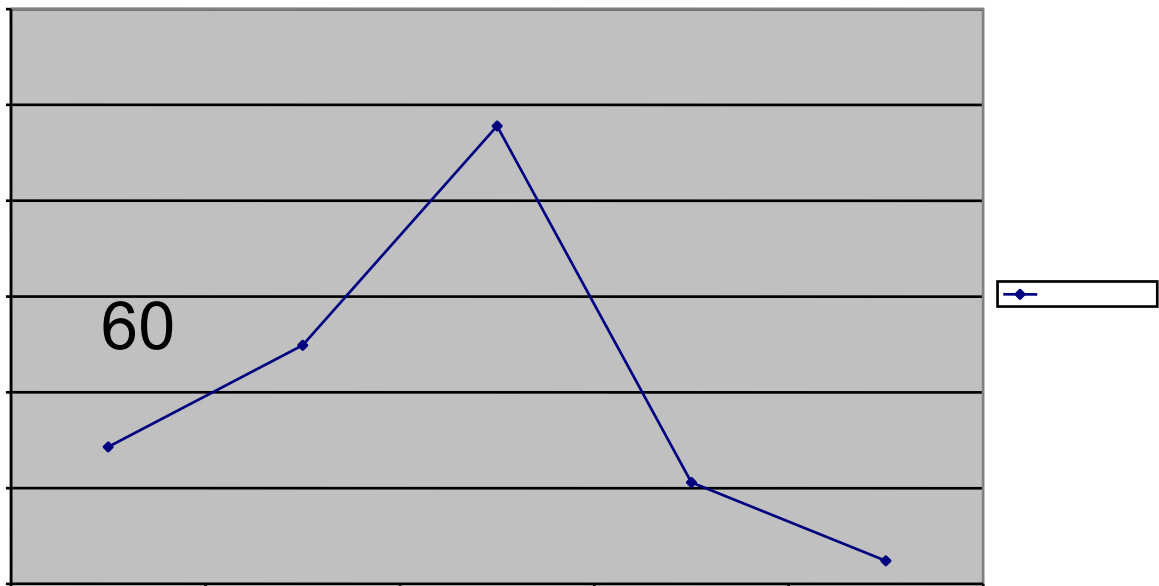
However, the encoding of evaluative tone proved to be a far more straightforward process than anticipated, principally because the evaluations of Muslims were often blatant and unashamed (e.g. 17/10/06 – *‘Pope Kill’: Muslims Uni Chant*, 16/2/07 – *‘Muslim Bomb Nutter works on Trains’*).

Van Dijk claims that little scholarly analysis is needed to establish the significant style differences between conservative and liberal newspapers, especially between the ‘quality’ press and the tabloids (van Dijk 1991: 209). And so it proved, with a good example of this differentiation occurring in the publication on 16<sup>th</sup> September 2006: Whilst a popular broadsheet reported an event with the headline *‘Pope backs down on Islam,’* The Sun chose to present a confrontational, almost animalistic picture of the dissenting Muslims in question by leading with *‘Islam fury forces Pope on backfoot’*. Such powerful sensationalism is indicative of The Sun’s controversial approach to

sensitive issues, which indirectly made the establishment of evaluative tone that much easier throughout the research. The results for all 245 articles were as follows:

***Tab 3.0. Evaluative tone presented within data sample***

<b>Evaluative Tone</b>	<b>No. of articles</b>	<b>% total articles</b>
Inherently negative	35	14.3
Critical	61	24.9
Neutral	117	47.8
Favourable	26	10.6
Inherently positive	6	2.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>245</b>	<b>100</b>



Unsurprisingly, a large proportion (47.8%) was deemed to be neutral in their stance towards Muslims. In considering that the profession of journalism hold truth-telling as its fundamental basis (Belsey & Chaffin 1992: 1) and that it prides itself on an objective, impartial approach, the fact that less than half of the sample data presented a neutral tone

may be seen as disappointing. Many more stories (39.2%) portrayed Muslims in a broadly negative light than in a positive one (13.0%). Just six examples (2.4%) were found to demonstrate an inherently positive representation, whilst some 35 (14.3%) were overtly negative.

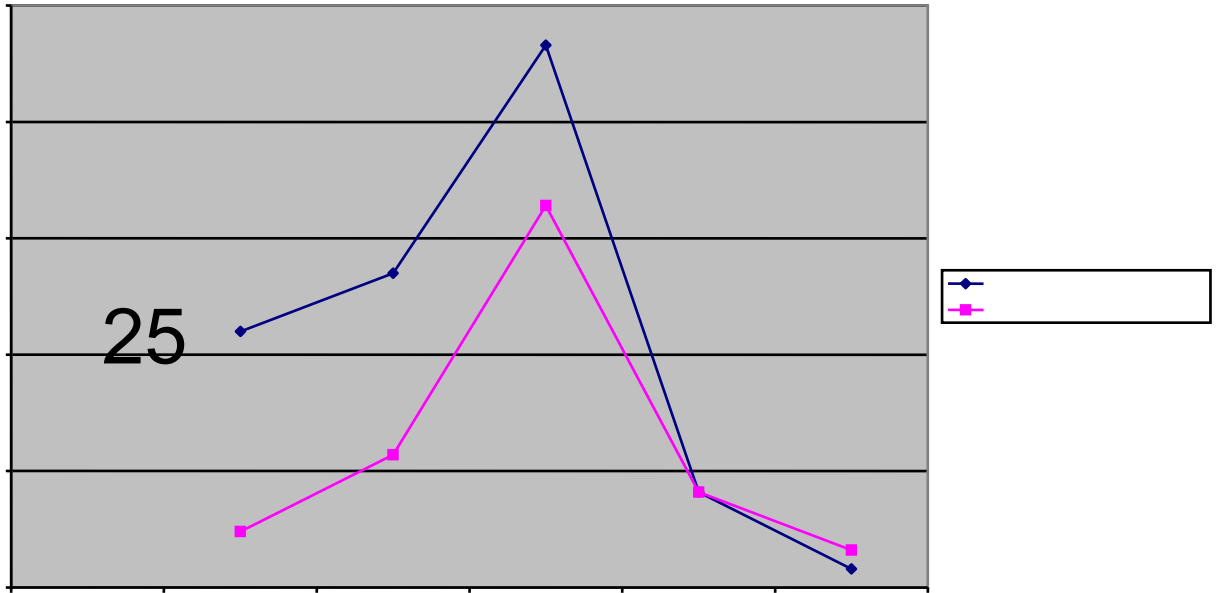
Somewhat worryingly, this data is largely in keeping with the marginalisation techniques recognised by Conboy (2006: 96). Presumptions of cultural superiority enable journalists from The Sun to form an alliance with their readership, depicting Islam and its followers negatively and promoting divisional ideals. In this sense, criticisms suggesting the publication is “populist in the worst possible sense” (McGuigan 1993: 184), in so far as it panders to public consensus by reinforcing oppressive ideologies, can be seen to carry an element of truth.

When cross-referencing these findings with those from the source analysis, a pattern contradicting Richardson’s hypothesis once again emerges.

***Tab 3.1. Primary sources utilised for differing evaluative tone***

<b>Evaluative Tone</b>	<b>Non-Muslim primary source</b>	<b>% of total articles</b>	<b>Muslim primary source</b>	<b>% of total articles</b>
Inherently negative	27	11.0	6	2.4
Critical	33	13.5	14	5.7
Neutral	57	23.3	40	16.4
Favourable	10	4.1	10	4.1
Inherently positive	2	0.8	4	1.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>129</b>	<b>52.7</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>30.2</b>

He claims that “when Muslim activities are not criticised, Muslim sources are, almost without exception, absent from journalistic texts” (Richardson 2006: 115). Fig 3.1 (overleaf) disproves this observation, suggesting that it is only when Islam is presented in a positive light that Muslim sources outnumber their non-Muslim counterparts. When



adopting an inherently negative, critical or neutral tone in reporting, the utilisation of differing primary sources follows the pattern set out in Fig 2.0, yet when demonstrating a positive stance, Muslim voices become more prevalent.

20

%

15

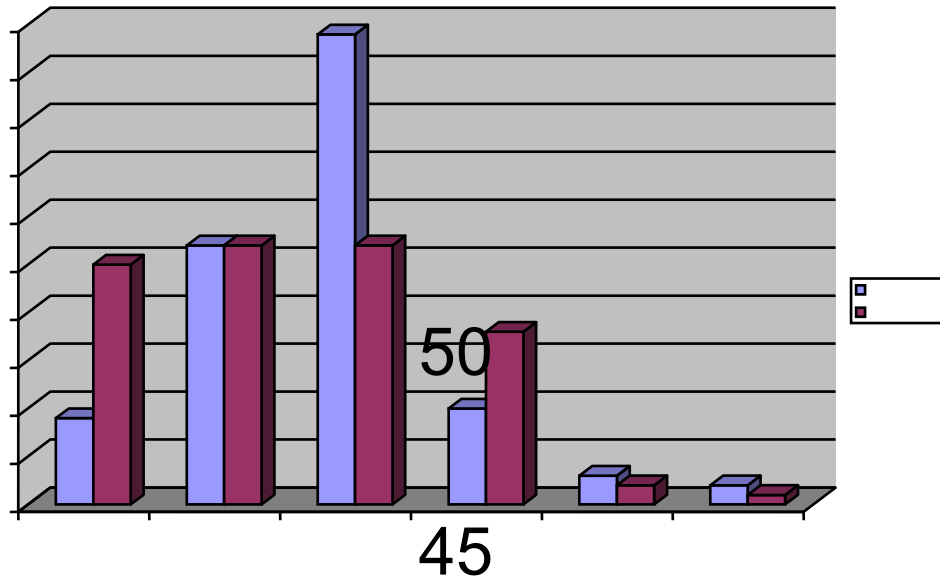
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5.2. Section 2: Questionnaire

**Tab 4.0. Q1: How often do you read this newspaper?**

	<b>London</b>		<b>Birmingham</b>		<b>Leeds</b>	
	<b>The Sun</b>	<b>Broadsheet</b>	<b>The Sun</b>	<b>Broadsheet</b>	<b>The Sun</b>	<b>Broadsheet</b>
Daily	3	9	5	11	3	2
3-5 times per week	14	5	9	7	8	12
1-2 times per week	14	8	21	8	22	8
1-2 times per month	7	7	4	2	1	7
Seldom or never	2	0	1	2	0	0
Pass	0	0	0	0	2	1

	<b>Total</b>			
	<b>The Sun</b>		<b>Broadsheet</b>	
Daily	<b>11</b>	(9%)	<b>22</b>	(25%)
3-5 times per week	<b>31</b>	(27%)	<b>24</b>	(27%)
1-2 times per week	<b>57</b>	(49%)	<b>24</b>	(27%)
1-2 times per month	<b>12</b>	(10%)	<b>16</b>	(18%)
Seldom or never	<b>3</b>	(3%)	<b>2</b>	(2%)
Pass	<b>2</b>	(2%)	<b>1</b>	(1%)

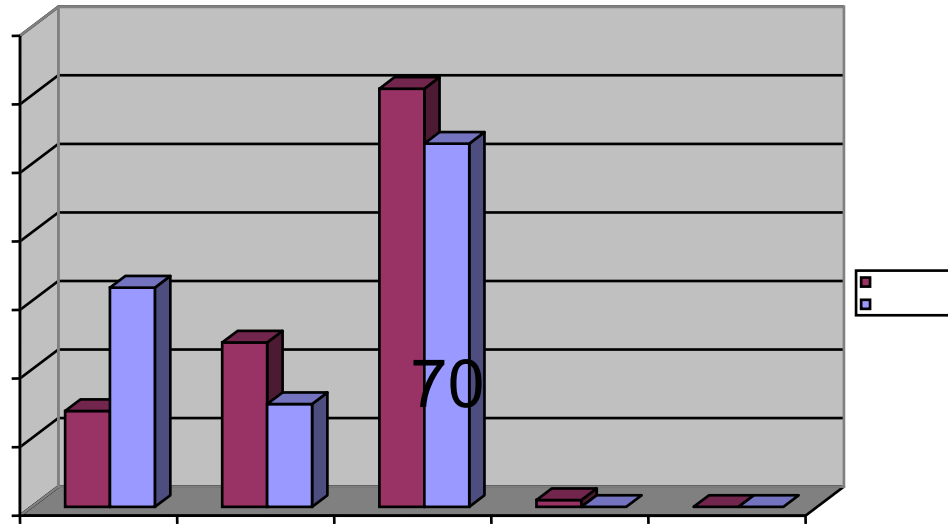


The data identifies that the majority of informants read newspapers at least once every week. 85% of Sun readers and 80% of broadsheet readers purchased their desired publication on a minimum of one occasion per week. Broadsheet readers indicated a wider variety of reading habits, with each of the first four options accounting for around 20% of answers given. Interestingly, very few Sun readers (9%) claimed to read the newspaper on a daily basis, instead generally selecting it 1-2 times per week (49%). This demonstrates a similarity with the weekly magazine market, designed to stimulate and entertain its consumers, rather than to simply inform them. Conversely, 52% of participants opting for broadsheets did so at least three times a week, indicating that such readers typically select their desired publication on a regular basis.

***Tab 4.1. Q2: Why do you choose this newspaper?***

	<i>London</i>		<i>Birmingham</i>		<i>Leeds</i>	
	The Sun	Broadsheet	The Sun	Broadsheet	The Sun	Broadsheet
For information	6	11	2	6	8	12
For entertainment	11	0	7	5	10	8
Both of the above	22	18	31	19	18	10
Neither of the above	1	0	0	0	0	0
Pass	0	0	0	0	0	0

	<i>Total</i>			
	<b>The Sun</b>		<b>Broadsheet</b>	
For information	<b>16</b>	(14%)	<b>29</b>	(32%)
For entertainment	<b>28</b>	(24%)	<b>13</b>	(15%)
Both of the above	<b>71</b>	(61%)	<b>47</b>	(53%)
Neither of the above	<b>1</b>	(1%)	<b>0</b>	-
Pass	<b>0</b>	-	<b>0</b>	-



In keeping with Franklin's (1997) assessment that entertainment has superseded the provision of information in contemporary editorial priorities, Tab 4.1 shows that entertainment, rather than information, exists as the primary motivation for participants buying The Sun. 71 people (85%) claimed that entertainment played some part in their choosing The Sun, with only 16 (14%) saying it was for information alone. 68% of broadsheet readers chose their newspaper for entertainment purposes, with 32% doing so principally to keep up to date with current affairs. This is not to say that The Sun does not carry credibility in its dissemination of news, nor that broadsheets cannot be selected for entertainment purposes, but it does indicate an obvious divide between the two.

Schudson argues that two models of journalism exist can be identified, having existed ever since the conception of the industry, "a journalism of analysis and a journalism of entertainment" (Schudson 1978: 89). In this sense, and with specific regard to Tab 4.1, The Sun is likely to appear in the latter of these two categories, demonstrating as it does,

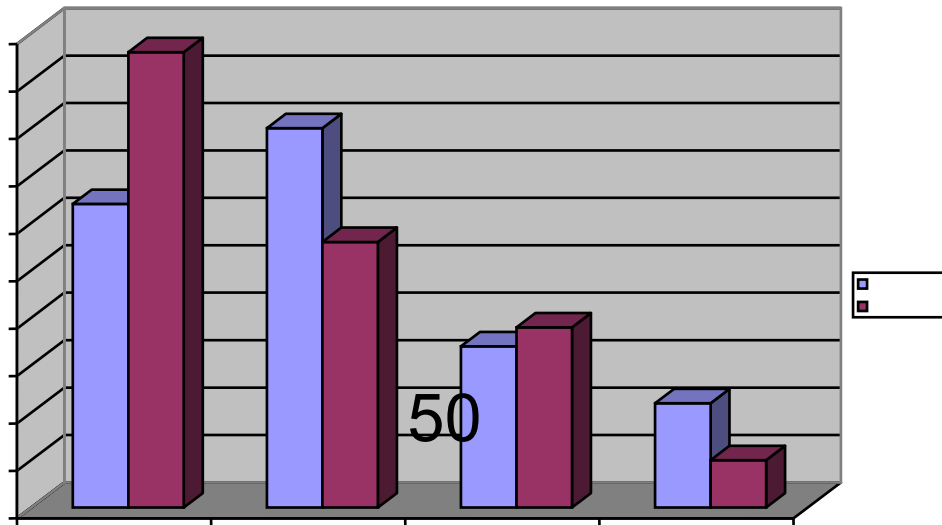


a user-friendly, digestible compression of ‘news values’ (Bell 1997: 69) which require very little effort and analysis in their consumption.

***Tab 4.2. Q.3: Does Britain view Islam and its followers negatively?***

	<i>London</i>		<i>Birmingham</i>		<i>Leeds</i>	
	<i>The Sun</i>	<i>Broadsheet</i>	<i>The Sun</i>	<i>Broadsheet</i>	<i>The Sun</i>	<i>Broadsheet</i>
Yes	8	11	22	23	7	9
No	17	12	6	3	23	10
Unsure	8	4	6	4	6	9
Pass	7	2	6	0	0	2

	<i>Total</i>			
	<i>The Sun</i>		<i>Broadsheet</i>	
Yes	<b>37</b>	(32%)	<b>43</b>	(48%)
No	<b>46</b>	(40%)	<b>25</b>	(28%)
Unsure	<b>20</b>	(17%)	<b>17</b>	(19%)
Pass	<b>13</b>	(11%)	<b>4</b>	(5%)



45

Firstly, it is important to note that questions 3, 4 and 5 produced comparatively high scores for the ‘abstain’ or ‘pass’ option. For each of these questions, around 10% of

40

informants chose to avoid making any sort of judgment on the issue. This reflects the sensitivity of the subject matter. The idea that certain subsections of society may be negatively viewed and consequently ill-treated by the media is one that sits uncomfortably with many of the participants, indeed the proposal that the tabloid press itself may be on the side of the indigenous, idealized ordinary people (Conboy 2002) is one on which the informants appear reluctant to pass judgment. Similarly, a large number selected 'unsure' for questions 3 and 4, demonstrating that prevailing opinions towards the Muslim community are mixed, and that if marginalisation techniques are present within the popular press, then readers may be largely unaware of them.

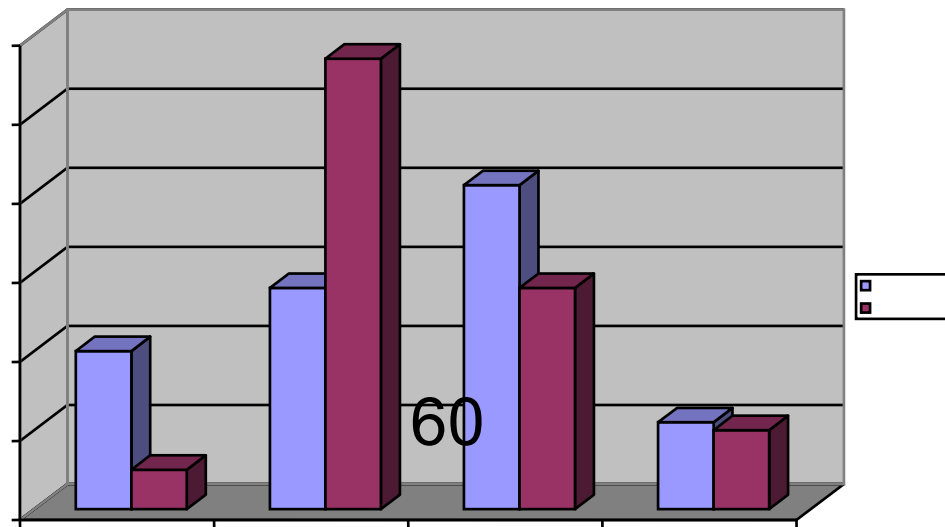
Tab 4.2 shows that a greater proportion of broadsheet readers (48%) believe that Islam and its followers may be negatively viewed by Britain as a nation, as compared to Sun readers (32%). 46 informants (40%) taken from the tabloid sample claimed that Britain did not adopt a negative stance towards Muslims, with the corresponding broadsheet figure standing at 25 (28%). This implies that the more educated, well-informed readers of 'highbrow' publications may be more aware, and certainly more objective, in their views on the Islamic faith and its representations in popular culture. The fact that such a significant percentage of Sun readers answered 'no' to question 3 is of particular concern when we consider that it is within this publication that the aforementioned techniques of marginalisation and vilification have been identified. Whilst The Sun offers the *only* critical perspective on the issue for the majority of such informants, it is perhaps no surprise that 40% see little wrong with the way Muslims are regarded and treated in contemporary Britain.

Nevertheless, 20% of these participants accepted that The Sun may adopt a negative stance towards Islam, whilst 28% claimed that it did not. Results for broadsheet

**Tab 4.3. Q.4: Does this newspaper view Islam and its followers negatively?**

	<i>London</i>		<i>Birmingham</i>		<i>Leeds</i>	
	The Sun	Broadsheet	The Sun	Broadsheet	The Sun	Broadsheet
Yes	5	0	13	3	5	1
No	12	14	9	16	12	21
Unsure	19	11	13	7	15	7
Pass	4	4	5	4	4	1

	<i>Total</i>			
	<b>The Sun</b>		<b>Broadsheet</b>	
Yes	<b>23</b>	(20%)	<b>4</b>	(5%)
No	<b>33</b>	(28%)	<b>51</b>	(57%)
Unsure	<b>47</b>	(41%)	<b>25</b>	(28%)
Pass	<b>13</b>	(11%)	<b>9</b>	(10%)



**Fig 4.3**

readers were much more consistent, in so far as a majority (57%) did not believe that their chosen publication viewed Muslims negatively (only 4 participants suggested this was not the case). Although, as Richardson (2004: 4) argues, the broadsheet may be equally guilty of formulating unfavourable frameworks through which Muslims are

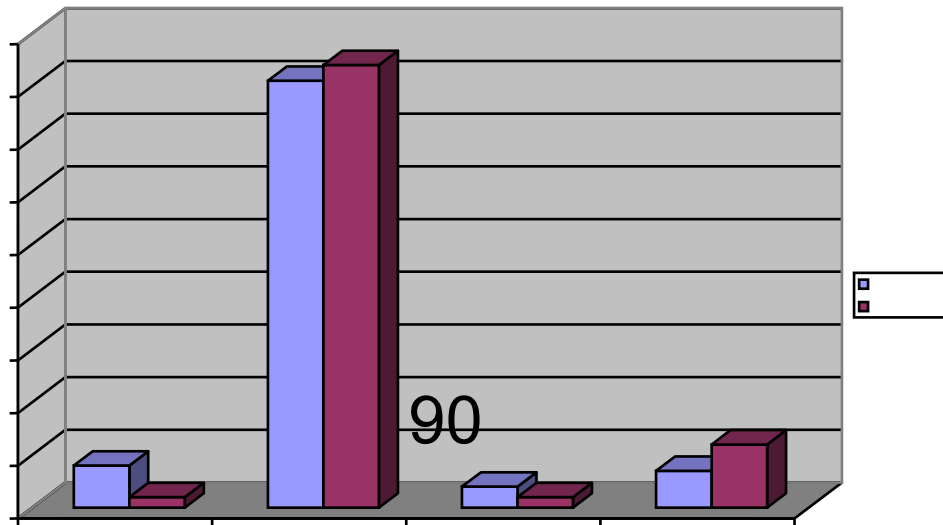
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presented, it certainly seems that there is a wider acknowledgment of marginalisation techniques in The Sun than in the ‘quality’ press.

**Tab 4.4. Q.5: Do you personally view Muslims negatively?**

	<i>London</i>		<i>Birmingham</i>		<i>Leeds</i>	
	The Sun	Broadsheet	The Sun	Broadsheet	The Sun	Broadsheet
Yes	2	1	1	0	6	1
No	36	24	29	29	29	21
Unsure	0	0	4	0	1	2
Pass	2	4	6	1	0	6

	<i>Total</i>			
	<i>The Sun</i>		<i>Broadsheet</i>	
Yes	<b>9</b>	(8%)	<b>2</b>	(2%)
No	<b>94</b>	(81%)	<b>74</b>	(84%)
Unsure	<b>5</b>	(4%)	<b>2</b>	(2%)
Pass	<b>8</b>	(7%)	<b>11</b>	(12%)



Unsurprisingly, very few contributors admitted to viewing Islam and its followers negatively on a personal level. Out of 205 people surveyed, 168 (82%) stated that they did not personally regard Muslims in a negative light. Most of the remainder were either

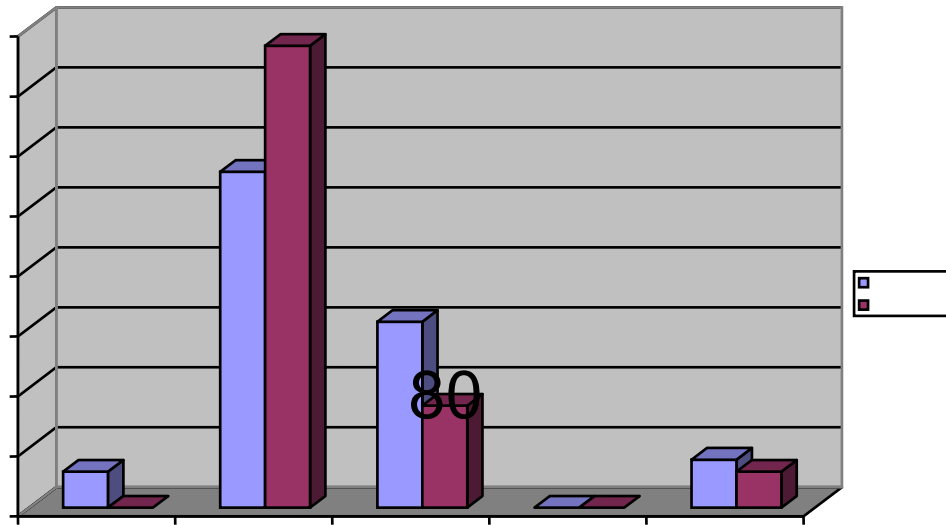
‘unsure’ or chose to ‘pass’. However, 9 Sun readers (8%) suggested this *was* the case – a figure some 6% higher than the broadsheet equivalent of 2%. Admittedly, these low figures come as a result of the relatively small data sample and thus drawing definitive conclusions based on the opinions of only a handful of people would seem unreasonable, yet the difference between the two groups *is* noticeable, as demonstrated in Fig 4.4.

The results indicate a higher level of suspicion and ill-feeling towards Muslims within participants who read The Sun, albeit a marginal one. Whether this animosity is created by the publication itself, or is merely present within those individuals who consequently select a newspaper which is likely to express opinions in keeping with their own, these findings highlight the dangers of racism in the free press. As previously stated, tabloids possess the capacity to “feed a style of reporting capable of mobilising prejudice against those who are already stigmatized” (Bourdieu 1998: 51) and although relatively few Sun readers admitted to viewing Muslims negatively, the very fact that some *did* may point to the potential existence of Islamophobia.

***Tab 4.5. Q.6: Who is the ‘war on terror’ being fought against?***

	<b><i>London</i></b>		<b><i>Birmingham</i></b>		<b><i>Leeds</i></b>	
	<b>The Sun</b>	<b>Broadsheet</b>	<b>The Sun</b>	<b>Broadsheet</b>	<b>The Sun</b>	<b>Broadsheet</b>
Muslims	1	0	1	0	4	0
Terrorists	21	20	27	26	17	23
Both of the above	11	5	12	3	13	7
Neither of the above	0	0	0	0	0	0
Pass	6	4	0	1	2	0

	<b>The Sun</b>		<b>Total</b>	
				<b>Broadsheet</b>
Muslims	<b>7</b>	(6%)	<b>0</b>	-
Terrorists	<b>65</b>	(56%)	<b>69</b>	(77%)
Both of the above	<b>36</b>	(31%)	<b>15</b>	(17%)
Neither of the above	<b>0</b>	-	<b>0</b>	-
Pass	<b>8</b>	(7%)	<b>5</b>	(6%)



Questions 6 and 7 help gauge the participant's perception of terrorism and its relationship with the Muslim world. Although the culprits responsible for 9/11 were identified as being Muslim and a considerable amount of modern-day terrorist activity is Islamic in origin, the religion itself cannot be considered the root cause. Nevertheless, the struggle for "hearts and minds" (Denzin and Lincoln 2003: 22) in the West's self-proclaimed war on terror is constantly hampered by government and mass media, who pander to audience prejudice by representing the war as a crusade against Islam. Tab 4.5 demonstrates this; 37% of Sun readers perceived the war as being fought against Muslims in some capacity, with 7 (6%) suggesting that Muslims alone formed the opposition. In comparison, only 15 broadsheet readers (17%) implied an automatic association with

**% Participants** 40

Islam, with none whatsoever placing Muslims as the specific opposition. The number of informants producing the desired answer of ‘terrorists’ was considerably lower amongst those purchasing The Sun (56%) than those opting for a broadsheet (77%).

This may be seen to exemplify Pintak’s proposal that popular news media have exacerbated the perception gap by presenting a binary picture... “framing the struggle against terrorism in absolutist terms that painted the world in black and white and ignored all shades of grey” (Pintak 2006: 188). Readers of broadsheet publications within the data sample certainly seem more capable of distinguishing the difference between terrorists and the wider Islamic community.

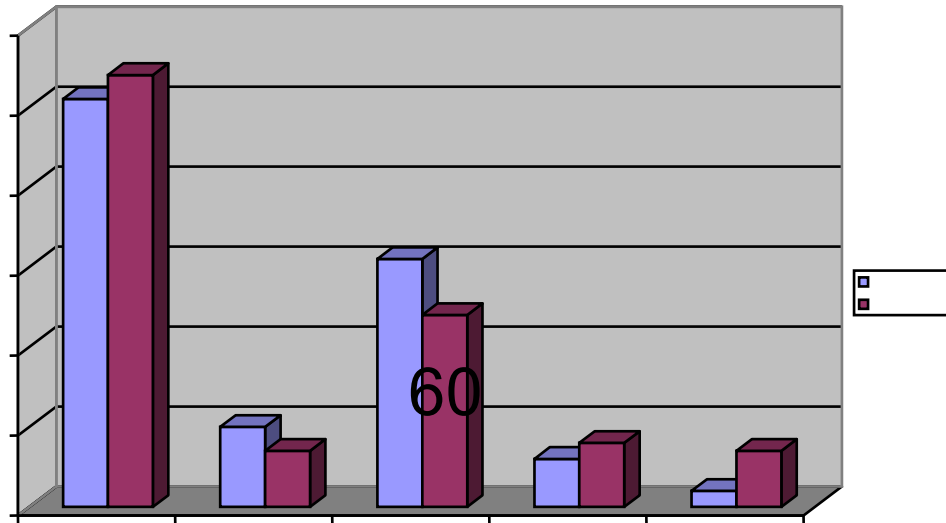
***Tab 4.6. Q.7: Who was responsible for the attacks of 9/11?***

	<i>London</i>		<i>Birmingham</i>		<i>Leeds</i>	
	<i>The Sun</i>	<i>Broadsheet</i>	<i>The Sun</i>	<i>Broadsheet</i>	<i>The Sun</i>	<i>Broadsheet</i>
Al’Qaeda	29	17	16	21	14	10
Muslims	5	4	2	0	5	2
Both of the above	5	4	20	7	11	11
Neither of the above	0	4	1	0	1	3
Pass	1	0	1	2	5	4

	<i>Total</i>			
	<i>The Sun</i>		<i>Broadsheet</i>	
Al’Qaeda	<b>59</b>	(51%)	<b>51</b>	(57%)
Muslims	<b>12</b>	(10%)	<b>3</b>	(3%)
Both of the above	<b>36</b>	(31%)	<b>22</b>	(24%)
Neither of the above	<b>2</b>	(2%)	<b>7</b>	(8%)
Pass	<b>7</b>	(6%)	<b>6</b>	(7%)

Fig 4.6 (overleaf) is in keeping with this theory, in that 12 Sun readers (10%) attributed the attacks of 9/11 to ‘Muslims’ alone, with a total of 48 (41%) identifying Muslims as being involved in some capacity. 25% of broadsheet readers also acknowledged an Islamic involvement, but only 3% blamed Muslims alone. A greater percentage of

informants purchasing broadsheets (57%) accurately identified Al'Qaeda as being responsible for the attacks than their tabloid-reading counterparts (51%).



Such discrepancies re-emphasise the perception gap that exists for many consumers of popular media, highlighting Sampson's criticism of the press and its ability to confuse news with entertainment, denying the public the ability to understand real problems (Sampson 1996: 42). Admittedly, question 7 is slightly ill-conceived, in so far as three of the potential options carry an element of truth (it could be argued, for example, that the 9/11 attackers *were* Muslim, therefore the second answer should also be deemed 'correct'). Nevertheless, 'Al Qaeda' probably represents the most appropriate response, and it is the broadsheet readers who appear best-equipped to acknowledge this.

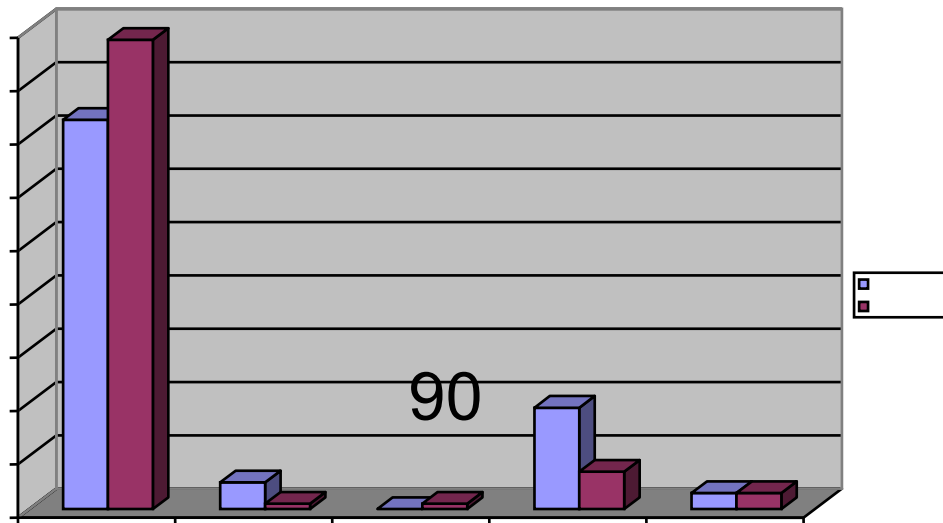
**% Participants 30**



**Tab 4.7. Q.8: What is the Islamic holy book commonly called?**

	<i>London</i>		<i>Birmingham</i>		<i>Leeds</i>	
	The Sun	Broadsheet	The Sun	Broadsheet	The Sun	Broadsheet
The Qur'an	26	24	33	29	25	25
The Torah	2	1	0	0	4	0
The Bible	0	1	0	0	0	0
Unsure	10	2	5	1	7	3
Pass	2	1	2	0	0	2

	<i>Total</i>			
	<b>The Sun</b>		<b>Broadsheet</b>	
The Qur'an	<b>84</b>	(73%)	<b>78</b>	(88%)
The Torah	<b>6</b>	(5%)	<b>1</b>	(1%)
The Bible	<b>0</b>	-	<b>1</b>	(1%)
Unsure	<b>22</b>	(19%)	<b>6</b>	(7%)
Pass	<b>4</b>	(3%)	<b>3</b>	(3%)



80

The results for question 8 indicate that a better understanding of Islam as a faith is displayed by broadsheet readers. 88% correctly suggested that the Islamic holy book is commonly called the Qur'an, which is to be expected from a supposedly educated and well-informed readership. Only 73% of Sun readers produced the same answer, with

70

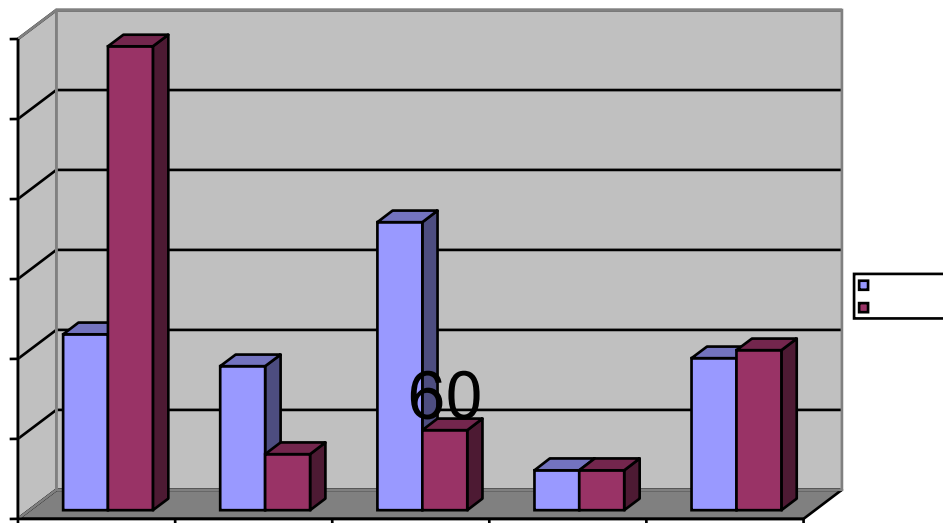
60

almost 20% selecting the ‘unsure’ option. This helps consolidate the hypothesis that such readers possess a limited understanding of the Muslim faith on a broader scale, and are comparatively uninformed about Islam in contexts away from the narrow frameworks of reporting set out by the tabloid media.

***Tab 4.8. Q.9: Who is Abu Hamza?***

	<b>London</b>		<b>Birmingham</b>		<b>Leeds</b>	
	<b>The Sun</b>	<b>Broadsheet</b>	<b>The Sun</b>	<b>Broadsheet</b>	<b>The Sun</b>	<b>Broadsheet</b>
A cleric	6	17	15	22	4	13
A terrorist	11	1	3	2	7	3
Both of the above	16	3	10	0	16	6
Neither of the above	0	0	2	3	4	1
Pass	7	8	10	3	5	7

	<b>Total</b>			
	<b>The Sun</b>		<b>Broadsheet</b>	
A cleric	<b>25</b>	<b>(22%)</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>(58%)</b>
A terrorist	<b>21</b>	<b>(18%)</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>(7%)</b>
Both of the above	<b>42</b>	<b>(36%)</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>(10%)</b>
Neither of the above	<b>6</b>	<b>(5%)</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>(5%)</b>
Pass	<b>22</b>	<b>(19%)</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>(20%)</b>



The data indicates a wide variety in perceptions towards the identity of the infamous Abu Hamza. The majority of broadsheet readers (58%) correctly identified Hamza as a cleric, yet 20% of such informants chose to 'pass' on this question. With a similar number of Sun readers also declining to answer, this reflects the acute sensitivity of the subject matter. 54% of Sun readers claimed that the man in question was involved in terrorist activity, with 18% suggesting he is primarily a terrorist. Answers linked to terrorism were far scarcer amongst broadsheet readers. These results are indicative of The Sun's rejection of individuals on the grounds of their religious background or alleged radical behaviour. As previously mentioned, Hamza has been selected as much on account of his abnormal appearance as for his extremist activity and has become a key figure in the personification of Islam as a religion of fanaticism. As a consequence of this, as Tab 4.8 demonstrates, The Sun's readership is unable to dissociate the man from the terrorist behaviour he is purported to have encouraged, the eventual result of which is a vilification of the Islamic faith.

## **6. Conclusions**

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Drawing definitive conclusions from a project that has covered such a broad subject matter is destined to be a difficult task, not least when we consider the variety of research methods that have been adopted for investigation. In this sense, it seems reasonable to suggest that this piece may have been somewhat overambitious in its objectives. On reflection, a more focused approach towards one specific aspect of the way in which Muslims are presented by The Sun may have produced a more reliable, comprehensive set of results. Moreover, the fact that broadsheet publications were not included within the analytical subdivision of the study could be criticised, as this led to the absence of a model which would have enabled the immediate comparison of data compiled from the publication. Certainly, such an inclusion constitutes an interesting opportunity for further investigation.

This is not to say that this dissertation has been unsuccessful. It has provided an ideal platform to research the representation of Muslims within the tabloid press and their obvious marginalisation as a minority community. The targets set out at the beginning of the piece have been achieved, and this project therefore represents a valid piece of research.

The analysis of subject inclusion identified a narrow reporting framework, in which Muslims are closely associated with extremism, criminality and integrative difficulty. Islam and its followers are routinely presented as the idealised ‘other’ – alien to indigenous communities and a threat to Britain’s stability. By placing negative value

on religious, social and physical differences, the publication could potentially emphasise an inherent cultural incompatibility and in so doing, provoke concerns regarding the successful integration of Muslims into British society.

As predicted by van Dijk (1991: 75), the selection of speakers within *The Sun* is partisan. There is an obvious preference for non-Muslim sources, most notably in textually prominent positions. The relative absence of Muslim sources is indicative of a marginalisation of ethnic voices.

The basic evaluative tone analysis suggests that the publication readily portrays Islam in a negative fashion. Although Richardson's belief that Muslim voices are only called upon in contexts critical of such peoples was found to be untrue, the dominance of dissenting articles must be seen to promote divisional ideals and reinforce oppressive ideologies.

Section 2, which surveyed the reading habits, expectations and subject knowledge of the consumers of popular news media, produced two very different models of the idealised reader. The *Sun* reader typically purchased the publication for entertainment purposes and demonstrated a greater level of negative sentiment towards Islam and its followers, but was less likely to acknowledge the victimisation of Muslim peoples and appreciate the journalistic techniques used to communicate this. Furthermore, many such readers interpreted Muslims to be the central opposition in the war on terror, demonstrating a lack of understanding that serves only to intensify feelings of suspicion and resentment. Broadsheet readers, on the other hand, selected their newspaper on the basis of information and displayed a wider understanding of Islamic identity and activity in contemporary society. They were better informed, less likely to adhere to the rigid

perceptions of Muslims as a negative influence on British culture, and more aware of the alleged vilification of the faith.

This dissertation underlines the requirement for an objective, impartial approach to the reporting of sensitive issues. The ‘wilful ignorance’ of an increasingly polarised media can only be overcome by honest, representative journalism, the application of which is critically endangered by the presence of an unelected, commercially powerful media. As this research suggests, a biased press may consolidate existing ideologies, operating in ‘fertile’ ground and pandering to prevailing audience tastes by reinforcing ideals of national identity. The power and social significance of tabloids in the UK should not be underestimated, and whilst the only critical view of society for Sun readers is that filtered by an arguably racist publication, the recognition that poor professional practice may actively deny successful cohesion and cooperation becomes all the more distasteful.

There seems little doubt that The Sun is culpable for the maintenance of anti-Muslim racism specifically, in so far as its representation of Islam predominantly argues that Muslims are both separate from, and inferior to, the indigenous population. As Richardson suggests, Muslim cultural *difference* is frequently interpreted as cultural *deviance* and increasingly as a *threat* to modern-day Britain (Richardson 2004: 232). The frameworks set out by Poole (2006: 84) which identify the tensions created by inherent cultural differences and frame Muslims as a danger to mainstream values and national security, are widely recognisable throughout the investigation. Whilst we cannot attribute the creation of Islamophobia exclusively to The Sun, it certainly demonstrates a

reluctance to distance itself from existing opinions associated with the concept, instead promoting a stance that may intensify the perceived prejudices of its readership. The longer this subjective approach continues, the more persistent the narrow frameworks of reporting are likely to become, dictating that a racist ethnic ideology may ultimately become established as a legitimate view of Muslim people.



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## 7. References

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## **8. Appendices**

